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Alexei Tolstoi

THE LAME PRINCE

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ХРОМОЙ

БАРИН

Р О М А Н

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
МОСКВА

Alexei Tolstoi

THE LAME

PRINCE

A STORY

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

DESIGNED BY L E O N I D L A M M

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From off his throne on ice-bound crag,
Free exile from his native highlands,
The waterfall leaps like a stag,
To gorgy gloom and prison silence
The cloud back to the mountain drawn,
By hand of love that never falters
Like lamb's blood spilling o'er the altar,
Spreads crimson on the gleaming snow

VYACHESLAV IVANOV, "Guiding Stars."

MOONLIGHT

I

By midnight the moon stood over Kolyvan, lit up the irregular windows of the log-cabins on one side, sent the black shadows along the trampled sorrel of the village street on the other, and then disappeared behind a solitary cloud that had strayed into the night sky. This was the time when an open carriage drawn by three horses abreast, the harness bells muffled, came racing hell for leather through the village.

The cocks had not yet begun their matutinal crowing but the dogs had already ceased their yelping and the only light visible was that which shone through the cracks in the shutters of the last house in the village.

A long pole on top of which was a hoop with a bundle of hay tied to it, stuck up above the gambrel roof of the gate telling the traveller from afar that this house was an inn. Beyond the inn the flat steppe, grey in the moonlight, stretched away into the distance; it was in this direction that the lathered horses were being driven, the regular gallop of the trace-horses and fast trot of the shaft-horse sounding dully in the silence of the night. The man in the carriage raised his cane and touched the coachman. The horses sat back on their haunches and pulled up in front of the inn.

The man unwound a travelling rug from his legs, climbed out by holding on to the coachman's box and limped across the grass to the low porch of the inn. There he turned back and spoke softly to the coachman:

"You may go. Be back at dawn."

The coachman flipped the reins, the carriage rolled away into the steppe and the man took hold of the door handle, rattled it and then leaned back against the rickety post of the porch as though wrapped in thought. His narrow face was pale, there were shadows under his long eyes and his small wavy beard was worn to leave the chin bare. Slowly he drew off his right glove and knocked again.

The patter of bare feet across the creaking boards of the outer room came to him, the door opened a tiny crack, was then thrown wide open and a young peasant woman stood on the threshold.

"Alyoshenka!" she exclaimed in happy excitement. "And I didn't expect you." She touched his hand shyly and kissed his shoulder.

"Will you let me in, Sasha?" he asked. "I'll stay till morning." He walked into the moonlit outer room of the inn.

Sasha went in front of him and kept turning back with

a smile on her fresh and pretty face that showed her white teeth.

"I saw you ride through the village at midday. 'He's probably going to Master Volkov,' I thought. I thought they would press you to spend the night there but here you are, come to see me."

"Have you any guests in the inn?"

"There's nobody here," answered Sasha, going into the summer living room. "Some peasants with hay wains stopped here but they are all sleeping outside," and she sat down on a wide bed covered with a patchwork quilt and smiled tenderly.

The moonlight, shining through the tiny window, lit up Sasha's face, the slightly upturned corners of her lips and her long neck emphasized by the opening of her black sarafan; a string of amber beads trembled on her bosom.

"Bring some wine," said the newcomer.

He stood in the shadow holding his hat and stick. Sasha jumped up obediently and went out. He lay down on the bed and put his hands behind his head. A slight frown gave a twist to his face and distorted it. He turned on his side, grabbed a pillow and buried his face in it.

Sasha returned carrying a small table covered with a napkin; she placed two bottles on it, one of wine and one of some sweet alcoholic decoction, then climbed up some steps to the larder and brought down a plate of nuts, raisins and cookies. She moved rapidly and lightly, going back and forth from moonlight to shadow. The man on the bed raised himself on to his elbow.

"Come over here, Sasha," he said. She immediately sat down at his feet on the bed. "Tell me, Sasha, if I were to hurt you really badly, if I were to insult you mortally, would you forgive me?"

"As you will, Alexei Petrovich," answered Sasha in a tremulous voice, after a slight pause. "And for your

love I thank you humbly." She turned away from him and sighed.

For a long time Prince Alexei Petrovich Krasnopolsky tried to get a glimpse of the expression on Sasha's face in the dark.

"Anyway, you wouldn't understand," he said softly, almost lazily. "You're glad I've come and you didn't even ask where I'd come from and why I am lying here on your bed. My lying here on your bed now is disgusting. Yes, horrible, Sasha, rotten. . . ."

"What are you saying?" she muttered in terror. "As though I had let you come in and did not love you."

"Come closer. That's better," continued the prince and seized Sasha by her round shoulders. "I said that you wouldn't understand, so don't try to. Listen, this evening I had a long talk, as long as I wanted, with a certain person. And it made me feel good, very good."

"With Miss Volkova?"

"Yes, with her. I sat close to her and my head was dizzy than it ever gets from your wine. You know, sometimes you dream that somebody is stroking you tenderly, that's how I remember her, just as in a dream. I have just come away from there and was thinking that everything would go well with me. But when I drove into Kolyvan I realized that all I had to do was halt my carriage at your door and all my well-being would fly away to the devil. Now do you understand? No? I must not come to you any more. I wish you'd poison me."

Sasha's hands dropped helplessly to her sides, she lowered her head.

"Are you sorry for me, Sasha? Are you?" asked the prince; he drew her towards him, kissed her face but she did not open her eyes or part her tightly clamped lips; she was like a woman of stone.

"Stop it," he said. "I'm only joking."

At last she spoke in a tone of sheer desperation:

"I know you're joking, but I believe you all the same. Why do you torment me? There is not the smallest part of my soul left unbruised. I know you only love me out of pity. I'm just a peasant woman, what can I expect from life, how can I hope for happiness!"

At this moment a cock crowed loudly outside. A sleepy horse pawed the boards of its stall. In the faint morning light the prince's gaunt but handsome face gradually became visible. His big eyes were sad and serious, a slightly sarcastic smile had frozen on his lips.

Sasha looked at him for a long time, then began to kiss his hands, shoulders and face; she lay down beside him, warming him with her strong and amorous body.

II

In a new log cabin that stood on the other end of the village in the middle of a small weed-ridden yard surrounded by a wattle fence, Doctor Zabolkin lay on the sleeping-shelf of the stove.

All that was visible from below was a head and a chin covered with stiff red bristles supported between two fists. Tufts of the same red hair stuck out in all directions, starting from the crown of the head and falling over the forehead and obscuring the eyes; the face was unwashed and puffed from sleep.

Doctor Grigory Ivanovich Zabolkin, screwing up his eyes, spat down from his shelf, aiming at a knot in a floor board.

Opposite him, on a bench under the tin lamp on the wall, sat a priest, a man of small stature, calm and humble in appearance, with a tinge of grey in his dark locks. The sleeves of his cassock were greasy and in concertina folds. With a wry face Father Vasily sat in silence, his hands in his sleeves, watching the doctor and his spitting.

"How low a man can fall in three years," said Father Vasily at last.

"And don't you like it?" responded Grigory Ivanovich lazily. "It's been a habit of mine from childhood: whenever I'm absolutely fed up I just creep into some hole and spit. If you don't like it, don't look. I even used to have a favourite place for it—under the barn where the grass grew soft. Our bitch always used to have her pups there. The pups were warm and smelt of milk, the bitch licked them and they whined softly. It's good to be a dog, honest it is."

"You're a fool, Grigory Ivanovich," said Father Vasily after a pause. "I'd better go."

"You have no right to go until you provide me with spiritual comfort, Father Vasily. That's what the government pays you money for."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"You have graduated the university, you are still young, you have a lay profession. Why, in your place I'd be laughing all day long. But you, no! What are you fit for with your ideas? You just lie and spit."

"Once, Father Vasily, I had wonderful ideas." Grigory Ivanovich turned over on his back, stretched his arms out from the shelf, snapped his fingers and yawned. "It's true I can't get used to vodka."

"Ugh!" said Father Vasily; with great care he took a tin cigarette-case from the pocket of his cassock, struck a match, holding it between his cupped palms from force of habit, like one who usually lights matches in the wind, lit his cigarette, rolled the match-stick between his fingers and then threw it under the bench. "Believe me, if there were other educated people in the village I would never come here."

There had been many conversations of this sort between the doctor and Father Vasily since spring, when the Koly-

van hospital burnt down. Grigory Ivanovich had then handed over all the work to his assistant and had retired to the little cottage that the Zemstvo had rented until a new hospital was built.

Three years before Grigory Ivanovich had received his first appointment at Kolyvan. He had begun eagerly driving round the villages, giving medical treatment and even helping his patients with money. Dragging through the mud of the flooded dirt-roads or with the icy wind cutting right through him on a January night when a dead moon hung over the dead snow; looking into tiny stuffy hovels full of screaming, scabby kids; gassed and driven to distraction by the acrid smoke in black bath-houses where women screamed in childbirth; sending despairing letters to the Zemstvo for more medicines, more doctors and more money; realizing that no matter what he did it all disappeared into the bottomless abyss of village poverty, ruin and mismanagement—Grigory Ivanovich felt at last that he was alone with a jar of castor-oil on a territory sixty versts across, where the children died by hundreds from scarlet fever and the adults from hunger-bred typhus and that in any case the castor-oil would not help and was not what was wanted. Then the hospital burnt down and he poured the castor-oil on the ground and climbed up on to his shelf.

Father Vasily, before whose eyes the third doctor had been crushed in this way, was very sorry for Zabolkin and went to him almost every day, and tried in some way or another, with a cigarette or a funny story, not to comfort him—for how can you comfort a man when there's nothing left of him but ashes?—but at least to make him laugh for a little while; at least he would laugh a little.

Grigory Ivanovich stopped his yawning, turned over on his stomach, stretched out his hand and asked for a smoke.

"I bought tobacco from Kurbeney today," said Father

Vasily in answer to this; standing under the shelf on tiptoe he lifted up the cigarette-case, at the same time pressing a secret spring.

Although Grigory Ivanovich knew that the cigarette-case was a trick one, he pretended not to remember it and fumbled in the false bottom where there were no cigarettes.

"That's a 'Freeman's' for you," laughed Father Vasily, well pleased with the joke. "Here you are, take a smoke. You know, I was at Volkov's today."

"They say he's a beast, a real brute, that Volkov of yours."

"It's absolutely untrue! People say all kinds of silly things. He's a splendid fellow and he lives— You ought to take a good look at such people, Grigory Ivanovich, and then you wouldn't lie about on a stove. And his daughter, Yekaterina Alexandrovna, believe me, she's a real beauty, a noble creation of the Lord. If I were a painter, I would paint her as Mary Magdalene smiling at her bridegroom."

"What do you mean—smiling at her bridegroom?" Grigory Ivanovich interrupted him.

"Haven't you heard about it? The great painters have always caught that smile in their best creations. A maid, a virgin, the vessel of love and life, always smiles wonderfully as though she can see an angel beside her pointing his finger at her womb. I am not joking. Don't you laugh at it." Father Vasily raised his brows and puffed at his cigarette, blowing the smoke down his nostrils, and then said, "Yes, and that's that," sighed, and went out without saying another word.

Grigory Ivanovich, however, was not laughing. He lay quietly on his shelf with his eyes closed and his teeth clenched because, after all, he was only twenty-eight and casual words about virginal smiles could still strike him like thunder.

III

The moonlight was bright in the dark blue sky and it seemed that there was no end to it—it found its way through cracks, through closed eyelids, into bedrooms and box-rooms, into the lairs of wild beasts, down to the bottom of the pond whence the spellbound fish came swimming up and touched the surface of the water with their round, open mouths.

That same night the moon hung over the betrampled bank of the pond—it spread like a wing of light out of the dense growth of the Volkov garden.

A broad-shouldered, bearded groom lay resting on his elbow on a sheepskin coat spread on the grass by the water. A stable-boy was dreaming in the saddle near by; his grey horse, half asleep, nodded its head and rattled its bit. The horses were grazing on the low meadow amidst the tall burdock and wormwood. The young colts lay on their sides muzzling their long legs.

An old man dressed in a caftan was walking slowly along the bank, coming from the direction of the high willows on the dam. He reached the groom, stopped and stood for a long time, either looking at something or listening.

"It's indeed warm tonight," said the old man.

"What do you keep wandering about like this for, Kondraty Ivanovich?" asked the groom lazily. "Are you worried about something?"

"I can't sleep, so I came out for a stroll."

"Thinking a lot?"

"Well, I do think. . . . I've been milling around these places all my life as though I were in a wheel—all about the house and around it. I've worn the earth down to the very stones. And so I return on my old footsteps. They seem to attract me. Maybe it's time to die, eh?"

“It’s time you had a rest, Kondraty Ivanovich, time you went on pension.”

“The master’s been kicking up a fuss again,” said Kondraty in a low voice. “The prince came again at dusk. He left his carriage beyond the pond, took a boat and crept up to the summer-house like a thief and there he had a talk with the young lady. He sticks like a leech and he’s dangerous, I tell you straight.”

“He’s a prince, isn’t he, Kondraty Ivanovich? You and I work for wages, we’ve sold ourselves, we hold our tongues while he does as he pleases. They say he fires cannon when he sees his guests off.”

“There’s nothing bad about that, but why does he keep coming and doesn’t propose? Our young lady looks miserable.”

Kondraty Ivanovich stopped. The groom, sitting up on his coat, looked round him and shouted at the boy:

“Mishka, don’t sleep, the horses have gone!”

The stable-boy awoke in his saddle, jerked back his head, clicked his tongue and cracked his whip; the grey walked a few steps and stood still again, lowering her neck. Again she and the stable-boy dozed off—the night was so warm and calm.

Kondraty stood still for a while, then said very significantly, “Hm-m, that’s how it is,” and wandered back into the garden.

The old blasted willow, the wattle fence, the ditch with a narrow bridge over it, the paths, the outlines of the trees, all this was familiar to him and all of them, like keys, opened up old memories, the pleasant and the unpleasant, although, when he came to think of it, there had been little of the pleasant.

Kondraty had been valet to Vadim Andreyevich and to Andrei Vadimych and even remembered Vadim Vadimych Volkov himself although he was really afraid of remembering him even in his dreams—he had been

bewhiskered and terrible and could not control his rages, for the humiliation of the smaller landed gentry he kept a particularly daring jester, Resheto, and a crazy woman. These were Kondraty's parents and from his birth he inherited fear of all the Volkovs and loyalty to them.

Vadim Andreyevich, the father of the present Alexander Vadimych, had been a great lover of reading and writing, and had even published a pamphlet for peasants with the title *The Virtuous Toiler*, but he had been firmly opposed to the abolition of serfdom and one day he ordered one-eyed Fedka the herdsman to be brought to his room, sat him on a silk-covered settee, offered him a cigar and said, "Fyodor Ivanovich, you are now an independent and free individual, I congratulate you, you may go wherever you wish, but if you want to work for me then be kind enough to say so and we'll have you flogged in the stables for the last time." Fedka thought it over and said, "All right."

Under Vadim Andreyevich's father, Andrei Vadimych, Kondraty had begun service as a house-boy. The master had been fat and dull, he liked his steam-bath and used to get drunk there sitting naked amongst his guests and his wenches. His house servants burned him in that bath-house.

The present Alexander Vadimych Volkov was not that sort of smaller calibre. He had grown up when times were harder for the aristocracy and it was impossible to let oneself go to the full.

It was not that Kondraty did not fear Alexander Vadimych or did not respect him enough—but he was attached body and soul to his daughter Katyusha, the prettiest girl in the district.

Kondraty crossed the dam and walked down into the gully, climbed over the wattles and walked slowly along the damp and dark avenue.

It was quiet in the garden; occasionally a bird would stir in the linden branches and settle down to sleep again, the tree-frogs moaned tenderly and sadly, the fish splashed in the pond.

The oval pond was surrounded by a ring of ancient willows so thick and drooping that the moonlight could not penetrate their foliage; the moon played on the centre of the pond where either a duck or a young rook was floating on the glassy ripples, its outstretched wings scarcely supporting it as it lay on the water.

When he reached the end of the avenue, Kondraty looked to the left where the summer-house, grown lopsided from age, stood in the deep shadows beside the pond.

Peering closely he distinguished the figure of a woman in a white shawl leaning on the railing. A dry branch cracked under Kondraty's feet and the woman turned quickly and spoke in an agitated voice:

"Is that you? Have you come back?"

"It's I, Katyenka," said Kondraty, coughing; he walked towards the bridge.

Yekaterina Alexandrovna, wrapped in a shawl up to her chin, tripped lightly over the boards to the bank and stood still in front of Kondraty.

"Can't you sleep either?" she said. "There are so many mosquitoes in my room that I couldn't sleep. Take me home."

"Mosquitoes there may be," said Kondraty sternly, "but it's not nice for a young lady to be out on the pond at night alone. . . ."

Katyenka, who was walking in front, stopped short.

"What sort of a tone is that, Kondraty!"

"Just a tone. Alexander Vadimych rated me, rated me today, and with good cause: it isn't at all reasonable to go walking about at night, you know that yourself."

Katyenka turned away, sighed and walked on, brushing the wet grass with the hem of her skirt.

"Don't you tell Papa anything about tonight, dear," she whispered suddenly and her lips touched Kondraty's wrinkled cheek.

He took the young lady as far as the balcony from which six columns, the plaster peeling in places, rose up, the upper parts bluish in the moonlight; he waited until Yekaterina Alexandrovna had gone into the house, coughed, and went round the corner to a small porch that led to his little room with a window facing the bushes.

He had no sooner sat down on a trunk covered with a piece of felt than Alexander Vadimych's angry voice resounded through the house.

"Kondraty!"

From force of habit Kondraty made the sign of the cross over his heart and trotted down the long passage to the door behind which the master was shouting.

As he took hold of the door handle Kondraty could smell smoke. When he went in he saw Alexander Vadimych through clouds of thick smoke in which the candles flickered with a yellow light; the master was wearing nothing but a shirt open at his fat, hairy chest and his face was purple; he was bending over an earthenware brazier from which came clouds of smoke from burning peat. Raising his dazed and bulging eyes to Kondraty, Volkoy spoke in a hoarse voice:

"The mosquitoes have eaten me up. Get me some kvass." And when Kondraty turned towards the door he shouted, "I'll give it to you, you scoundrel! Why don't you close the windows at night?"

"I beg your pardon," answered Kondraty and ran to the cellar for kvass.

AN UNEXPECTED EMOTION

I

Grigory Ivanovich Zabolkin stared for a long time at the rags, rubbish, cigarette butts and dust on the bed-shelf, drew in a deep breath of the heavy air through his nostrils, touched his aching head, lifted himself up slowly as though his body were a heavy boneless mass, frowned and climbed down from the stove, feeling for the footholds with his feet.

When he reached the floor Grigory Ivanovich hitched up his trousers and bent over the fragment of a mirror that stood under the lamp. A greasy yellow face looked back at him with dull blue eyes and tufts of hair sticking out in all directions.

"What a mug!" said Grigory Ivanovich; he ran his fingers through his hair, threw it back from his eyes, then sat down at the table and rested his elbows on it.

There are fragments of thoughts that remain in the mind, ideas that have been saved up, as thick as marsh slime and as sickly as rot; if a man is able to pull them out from the depths of his soul, is able to withstand the impact of them and get rid of them—then everything within him will be cleansed; should he, however, merely turn them over, touch them gently like a sore tooth, breathe in the same rot over and over again, feel the sweet pain of loathing for himself—such a man is not worthy of a second thought, for that which is dearest to him is filth, he enjoys someone spitting in his face.

Grigory Ivanovich was very loath to part with his old thoughts—and in the course of three years he had piled up a considerable number. Apart from that it is often dangerous for a man whose spirit has still not fully matured to see none but the sick, unfortunate and tormented. In the preceding three years Grigory Ivanovich had seen

an inordinate number of peasant women tortured by childbirth and mistreatment, peasant men blackened by the excessive use of vodka and scabby children grovelling in dirt, hunger and syphilis. It seemed to Grigory Ivanovich that all Russia was the same—tortured, dark and scabby. If this were so and there was no way out of it, then let everything go to the devil. And if everything was filth and stench, it was because it had to be and there was no sense in pretending to be a man when you were really a pig.

“And that’s how it is, all signed and sealed,” he thought, waving his gaunt hand in front of his face. “I shall not take my life, of course, but neither will I lift a finger to improve it. Flaunted the Volkov maiden in front of me as a comfort. Listen, Father Vasily, I’d like to take your Volkov girl around where there is typhus—then we’d see how she would ‘smile at the bridegroom. . . .’”

Grigory Ivanovich laughed venomously, then began to think that perhaps he was not quite right.

“Let’s say that the young lady has never seen anything and doesn’t know anything—a hothouse fruit. That’s something by way of justification. But the priest makes me mad. . . . Where is all this goodness of yours, show it to me! Man is born in filth, lives like a swine and dies with a curse on his lips. And there is not a gleam of light in all this impassable morass. If I am an honest man I ought to spit honestly and frankly at this vileness called life. And first and foremost into my own mug.”

Grigory Ivanovich actually did spit in the middle of the floor, then turned to the window and saw that the day was breaking.

Somehow he had not expected it and it surprised him. He got up from the table and went out into the yard, breathed in the sharp odour of grass and dampness, and frowned as though the odour had destroyed some of his

ideas. Then he walked slowly along the fence towards the water meadows that bordered the stream.

The wattle fence that extended along two sides of the cottage and its yard ran down to the stream where the willows grew; one of them had had the crown lopped off and the top was sprouting a large number of branches, the other bent low over the narrow stream.

The sky was still dark but in the east, on the edge of the earth, a delicate light was spreading; against this light the peaks of the thatched roofs and the trees stood out clearly and more distinctly.

The village cocks crowed. The cock in Grigory Ivanovich's yard answered. A sharp breeze carrying the acrid smell of the grass blew through the willow and its leaves, rocking like little boats, rustled gently.

"This is all deception, there is nothing of importance in it," muttered Grigory Ivanovich as he stood by the tree watching intently how the pale gold of the east that was driving away the night sky became grey, then green like the water and then blue, and how a huge star still flamed, hanging low over the earth. This was all so unusual that Grigory Ivanovich opened his mouth and stared.

The star melted into the flaming eastern sky and suddenly disappeared as the sun rose in a fiery ball over the steppes.

Steam curled over the river. The wind sent bluish shadows chasing over the greyish grass. The rooks in the branches across the river screamed, and everywhere, in the bushes and in the grass, birds began to sing and chirrup. The sun rose over the steppes. . . .

Grigory Ivanovich, however, was stubborn: he smiled contemptuously, screwed up his eyes in the sun and wandered back into the stench of his log-cabin.

When he went in, the lamp on the wall was still burning with a yellow flame, the place still smelled of stale tobacco smoke, everything was just right for a headache.

“What a hell of a fug,” muttered Grigory Ivanovich and immediately turned back into the yard; he rubbed his forehead and thought: “I’ll go and bathe. Ugh, something strange is happening to me.”

II

The icy water made Grigory Ivanovich shiver and after plunging in twice with a splutter he dressed himself quickly, thrust his hands into his sleeves, sat down on the trunk of a willow that grew out horizontally and looked at the east.

The blue bends of the river disappeared into the reeds to appear again meandering across the green meadow and through the distant birch grove, into the open spaces beyond.

Amongst the sorrel on the opposite bank there were geese that looked like lumps of snow. In the water, hazy under the steam, the gudgeons swam about disturbing the water-weeds. On the bed of the river right below his feet lay a piece of old tree wood that looked just like a bewhiskered sheat-fish which the boys were so afraid of because it clutched at their feet. Little grey birds flew about whistling amongst the reeds.

Grigory Ivanovich, his teeth chattering, watched this scene of so much activity while the sun began to warm up his face and bare feet.

“Of course, it’s all very pleasant,” he thought, “but it will all be over very soon, it’s all pure accident.” He lowered his head and, for some reason or other, that night seemed to have been an evil dream—the time spent on the bed-shelf amidst the filth, the foul air and the head-ache.

The geese suddenly startled him: cackling loudly, they ran down the river led by an old gander. Spreading their white wings they leaped into the water and swam along turning their heads haughtily left and right.

Grigory Ivanovich stifled a sigh (it was as though his soul wanted to cry out but could not) and began to watch the haze rising from the river into the heavens.

The river was a long one, there were many bends and creeks in it and everywhere that faint haze was curling upwards and gathering into white clouds beyond the forest.

With the morning sun, the first white cloud floated up behind the birch grove, others following in its wake. The little clouds massed in billows over the grove as though forming a nest. Before you could glance round the whole sky was filled with white clouds, all floating in the same direction, slowly, like swans, aware of the brevity of their existence. Cool shadows cast by the clouds glided across the steppes. The clouds changed their shapes, turned into animals, spread out into glades, formed other figures and so would continue playing until the wind would gather them all into a big heavy mass, and the lightning pierced them and they bore fruit, pouring forth their waters on to the earth and themselves melting into nothing.

"I'm just a cur," muttered Grigory Ivanovich, "stubborn and lazy. But still it is wonderful. . . ."

Unable to restrain himself any longer he was so overjoyed that his hands began to tremble and his eyes blinked rapidly; he walked over to the fence, climbed on to it and looked round him to see whether there was not some unusual, kindly person to whom he could tell everything he felt at that moment.

Just then some boys came running along the street by the fence; they shuffled their feet, raising clouds of soft dust, they kicked and turned somersaults.

Following the boys came young girls, hand in hand, dressed in bright sarafans and kerchiefs. They were singing a song, a fine melody and although it was not a new one he did not know it.

The young men of the village brought up the rear. One of them, a tall and thin youngster in a torn homespun coat, was playing on a reed pipe, his upper lip swelling out like a balloon; another, stockily built and bandy, wearing a waistcoat and a peaked cap, was pulling at an accordion.

The lads and lasses turned round by the corner house and the fence. The songs and the music could still be heard even when they were some distance away. Then they came into sight a second time as they crossed a distant bridge and then disappeared behind a mound, behind the charred remains of the hospital.

"Amazing," muttered Grigory Ivanovich. "Or is it some special kind of day today?"

A sedate-looking peasant dressed in bright new clothes, hatless, his hair plastered with grease, came up to the fence; he took hold of a stake, pushed between the wattles a jackboot that had been smeared with tar and on which the dust and chaff had already had time to settle, and asked:

"Out for a walk?"

"Good morning, Nikita. Where has that crowd gone?" asked Grigory Ivanovich. "Is it a holiday today?"

"Whitsunday today, Whitsunday," answered the peasant, quietly. "Grigory Ivanovich, you're beginning to get the days mixed up. The girls have gone to make garlands."

Nikita tried the stake of the wattle fence to see whether it was firmly stuck in the ground or not and suddenly, slightly opening a mouth surrounded by a curly blond beard, looked Grigory Ivanovich straight in the eyes.

From the understanding gaze of the peasant's light eyes, colourless from exposure to the sun, from his tanned face, from his strong, fine-smelling body, Grigory Ivanovich realized that Nikita had come to look at him at his leisure to see what sort of fellow this gentleman was,

what was wrong with him—and, after glancing at him as he would at, say, a wheel, saw at once that Doctor Zabolkin was of no use to him, Nikita, because, although he was a doctor and read books, he did not know what to make of himself and was of no use to anybody.

Grigory Ivanovich realized all this and laughed.

“I have a little request to make,” said Nikita. “Come with me to Grandma, she’s been dying for a long time but the horses have all been busy and I haven’t been able to get away from work myself. I can run back right now and harness up.”

“That’s good!” exclaimed Grigory Ivanovich. “Run away and harness your horse.”

And Nikita did quickly harness his horse to a new cart which he drove up to the doctor’s porch, filled with fresh hay.

Grigory Ivanovich climbed contentedly into the cart, bunched up a bundle of hay for himself, sat down and crossed his legs under him.

“D’you know, Nikita, it really is a holiday today. I suppose you’re married? D’you love your wife?”

Nikita raised his brows, clicked his tongue to the horse and they drove off. His boots leaped and jumped against the wheel from the jolting of the cart. Grigory Ivanovich smiled broadly as he bounced up and down on the damp hay looking round him. It was good!

When the cart rattled over the Zemstvo bridge frogs jumped from the rails into the sedge grass and ducks ran out from under the bridge to catch them.

“A lot of frogs,” said Nikita and winked.

There were open pasture-lands and meadows across the river and beyond them stood the birch forest. Nikita turned round and made small talk with the doctor and as Grigory Ivanovich was silent most of the time and did not ask any silly questions Nikita began telling him about his worries, about what he had been thinking over

during the winter, and then said quite suddenly, screwing up his shrewd grey eyes:

"The peasant's life has become a hard one: everything is reckoned in money nowadays. And if you turn the peasant into money, what is he worth—not more than a penny. He works hard, and it seems hardly worth it. You begin to think. . . ."

Nikita frowned and then shook his head without waiting for an answer, smiled again and pointed with his whip towards the fringe of the forest.

The girls were moving about between the birches weaving garlands from the branches. The small boys had climbed up the trees. The young men were lying in the grass listening to the strains of the accordion.

"They'll all be drunk by the evening," said Nikita, "and there'll be such goings on! It used to be better."

The cart came out of the forest on to a narrow boundary road between fields of corn waving in the warm wind, fields that smelled of earth and honey. The clouds, now white and curly like fleece, could be seen all over the blue sky. The road dropped into a gully, then ran along the steep slope of a hill; on the horizon lay huge new piles of white clouds. What was there to wonder at in them? Somehow Grigory Ivanovich had not noticed it before, it was only now that he realized how beautiful they were.

"Look, Nikita, what wonderful clouds!" he exclaimed.

"Clouds, yes," answered Nikita, looking at them. "But they're empty, they're going for water and when they come back full of water they'll be darker. There was one cloud flew past the other day full of frogs. . . . We had a lot of fun."

He jumped down on to the ground and walked along beside the horse flicking the reins— the cart crawled up a sandy slope.

From the top of the embankment there opened up

before Grigory Ivanovich's eyes an extensive plain divided into light and dark green and yellow squares of corn with a pond, forming a pair of silver wings, and a wreath of willows around it. On the far side there was a village. Beyond the pond lay a garden with the red roof of a house showing through the curly tops of the trees.

"Volkov's place," said Nikita, pointing with his whip-handle.

And Grigory Ivanovich felt that a lovable joy like a soft breeze had touched his heart. He wanted to fly to that wide red roof and if only for a minute see how wonderfully Volkov's daughter smiled.

III

Nikita's sick grandmother lived on the far side of the Volga. The horse scarcely managed to drag the cart through the sand of the river-bank between the willow bushes, many of which were broken and smeared with tar. At last the discoloured roof of the floating wharf with its flag bearing the letters P.O.S., came in sight.

There was no wind. The wavelets left in the wake of a passing steamer travelled slowly towards the sandy bank, rocking two boats full of water that were moored to a landing stage. Grigory Ivanovich walked along the rocking boardwalk to the wharf, sat down and gazed at the distant bank, steep and green, where a big white house stood in an open space between the trees: it was a house with a dome and columns, with windows always boarded up—the Miloye manor house of the late Princess Krasnopol'skaya. In the course of his frequent travels Grigory Ivanovich had become accustomed to that house and did not notice that the windows had been opened and that between the columns people were moving—they looked no bigger than flies from the distance.

Suddenly a little white cloud arose in front of the

house, the sound of a cannon shot rolled across the river and a little later a heavily laden boat put off from the shore.

"Like firing at the Turks," said Nikita, standing by the railing. "The prince is seeing his guests off."

"Yes, yes," answered Grigory Ivanovich, "and I didn't even notice that there were people living in the house. How long has it been open?"

"Since spring, Grigory Ivanovich, when the owner appeared, the lame prince. And the goings-on here at first! People thought they would burn the house down. They say the prince wants to marry, you see, and he's coaxing brides with gunfire."

The boat came out diagonally across the river. Four sailors, hatless and in blue shirts, were at the oars. A red sunshade, swaying over the boat, was reflected in the water.

Soon the shaven heads of the sailors could be distinguished, and the faces of a girl and a fat man in a loose jacket and a white cap with a wide peak. He sat with his chin resting on a walking-stick, his long ginger moustaches hanging down the stick.

The girl sitting beside him was all in white. Her straw hat was lying on her lap. Two fair plaits were wound round her head and the sun, shining through the parasol, cast a rosy light on her oval, proud and beautiful face with its tiny, childish mouth.

"A serious gentleman," said Nikita. "Lives in the old way, sticks to his land but wants to marry his daughter to the prince—that's Volkov. . . ."

"So that's what she's like," thought Grigory Ivanovich and, suddenly feeling shy, he left the railing, walked along the deck of the wharf, reached the stern and hid behind sacks of flour; he blushed terribly and granted, "What nonsense, like a baby. . . ." And with his finger he began poking at a hole in a sack.

The sound of the oars reached him. The boat, carried by the current, drew nearer. Somebody in the boat shouted, "Catch hold!" A sailor on the wharf shouted, "Let her go!" and ran after the line that had dropped on the roof; the boat lurched heavily against the wharf and a second later Grigory Ivanovich heard a voice like music, "Papa, give me a hand," followed by a cry and a splash.

A shiver of fear ran over Grigory Ivanovich, he seized hold of the sack and then ran to the rail. . . .

Yekaterina Alexandrovna stood below the gangway holding up the sides of her wet skirt and laughing.

"You're not a goat, after all," Volkov said to her angrily. "You mustn't jump like that."

Both of them, father and daughter, walked up the gangway, made their way to the bank unhurriedly and got into a carriage drawn by a team of three black horses.

Yekaterina Alexandrovna turned her head and glanced at the house on the other side as though she were caressing it with her big grey eyes, slightly prominent like her father's. Volkov told the coachman to go and the horses in fancy harness pulled at top speed the lacquered carriage away from the willow bushes.

Grigory Ivanovich stood still for a long time watching the disappearing carriage, returned to the bench, noticed the wet track of a woman's shoe under his jackboot and carefully shifted his foot.

The steamer soon arrived. Grigory Ivanovich sailed down stream to Nikita's grandmother and came home late at night, exhausted and untalkative.

He did not go into the house but lay down to sleep on a trunk in the porch. He fell asleep immediately but not for long. The crowing of a cock awakened him and he looked at the rectangle of the open door through which he could see the stars, then turned on his side, shifted over on to his belly, screwed up his eyes and began to sigh and gulp.

VENOMOUS RECOLLECTIONS

I

Prince Alexei Petrovich woke up in a deep armchair before a dressing-table beside a high window with the curtains drawn aside. The curtains of the other two windows in the bedroom were drawn and the pendulum of the clock on the mantelpiece ticked away steadily in the darkness.

Through the windows the upper parts of the garden were visible; farther away was the lilac ribbon of the river, the floating wharf beyond it and then the patch of willow bushes, the water meadows with their reddish lakes—their oval surface reflected the sad sunset and grey clouds; a narrow road ran through fields and hills to the horizon, scarcely visible.

The edges of the clouds turned red from the setting, dying sun and the clouds that floated higher were rose-coloured in a sky of sea-blue; still higher a star had just lighted.

Alexei Petrovich stared at it all, touching his gaunt pale cheek with his cold fingers.

In the hollows of his eyes lay heavy blue shadows and the fine hair of his chestnut beard curled over his rounded cheekbone.

Only these—the white hand, cheek and prominent eyes—could be seen reflected in the mirror of the dressing-table; Alexei Petrovich, occasionally glancing at his reflection, did not move.

He knew that if he moved all the loathing of the previous night would rush to his head and spoil the calm contemplation of all the things that were as clear as crystal. His thoughts were also sorrowful and transparent.

Such is the sorrowful mien of the sunset over Russian rivers. And sadder still was the road that fled away into

the sunset: God knows whither it went or whence it came—it approached the river as though it wanted to drink and then run away again; there was something moving along it—was it a cart? You couldn't tell, and what did it matter, anyway?

This sorrow of the heavens and of the earth brought rest to Alexei Petrovich. It seemed that the past did not affect him and that which was to come would pass just as uselessly and phantom-like as ever and he—after noisy carousing with his friends, after disturbing evening rendezvous with Yekaterina Alexandrovna in the garden, when he wanted to touch at least her dress with his lips and did not dare, after Sasha's moving caresses, after joys and remorse and after, last of all, memories of St. Petersburg that stung like frost-bite—he would rub off the grease-paint like a tired actor and would for ever and ever gaze at that road and at a sunset that chilled the heart.

But scarcely had Alexei Petrovich thought of this tranquillity before contradictory ideas began to disturb him surreptitiously.

"You are cold and lonely like a corpse," one thought whispered to him. "You have merely destroyed yourself and others, and nobody is concerned about you sitting so small in that armchair. And you, perhaps the most miserable of all men, are in dire need of tenderness and sympathy."

"Nobody gives caresses and sympathy for nothing," answered a second thought.

A third said bitterly: "None of them did anything but take from you, make demands of you and leave you spiritually ruined."

"But then you didn't love anybody," said the first one again, "and now you are rejected and your heart has withered."

"No, I did love, I want to love and I can love," whispered Alexei Petrovich, turning round in his chair.

The tranquillity had been disturbed. Outside the sunset lost its colour and faded away, and its place was taken by the night that poured in from the sides.

"My God, what awful boredom," said Alexei Petrovich and pressed his hands so tight to his eyes that they hurt. He knew that the time had come for him to move restlessly in his chair, to bear the torment of shame and to think of St. Petersburg.

He could not get away from those memories, they were always there and could only be drowned in wine or debauchery.

II

Alexei Petrovich had served in a Guards Regiment in which he enlisted eight years before, the year his mother and father died.

He made his way steadily through his small fortune, confident that when the last hundred-ruble note had been changed, one of his relatives would die or, in general, something would happen.

Thanks to this confidence it would have been difficult to find a more carefree man than Prince Krasnopol'sky in all St. Petersburg. The ladies liked him very much indeed. His attachments had always been short-lived and flighty and never left any traces in him except tender and amusing memories.

He served six years in the regiment. The days had passed in hilarity and excitement. And then, one day, Alexei Petrovich looked back and it seemed to him that all these years he had been walking down a monotonous corridor and that ahead of him lay the same sort of dull, grey corridor. This new sensation of life astounded and saddened him.

Just about this time, in a tiresome and little-known house, in the drawing-room of Princess Matskaya, he had met a woman who suddenly, like a storm, awakened the dormant passions within him.

Alexei Petrovich stood beside an anaemic young diplomat listening to idiotic *exromptuses* and witticisms long known to the whole world, and had already decided to withdraw discreetly when the footman threw open the gilded doors. A very tall lady, her silk dress rustling, a silvery fur thrown over her shoulders, entered the room and sat down swiftly on the sofa.

Her movements were impetuous but hampered by her attire. Under her hat, hair the colour of copper rose up from a low forehead. Her face was lustreless with beautiful, half-closed eyes and a narrow nose—it was a troubled, unhappy face.

“Who is she?” asked Alexei Petrovich quickly.

“Mordvinskaya, Anna Semyonovna. She is talked about,” answered the diplomat, spilling the coffee from his cup on to the carpet.

That was their first meeting. Alexei Petrovich remembered every tiny detail of it.

When they were introduced, Anna Semyonovna narrowed her eyes and merely glanced at him as though she were weighing him up.

Alexei Petrovich, rattling his spurs and holding his hat on his hip, was trying to find the right words, they always came easily and ordinarily but now they seemed quite senseless.

Anna Semyonovna listened to him, sitting bolt upright, her pink ear slightly cocked. A white handkerchief that lay on her black skirt emitted some peculiar odour, something feminine, or perhaps the perfume came from her herself. Then she smiled just as though the audience was over. Alexei Petrovich did not immediately realize that he had to go away and she rose, rustling her silks and

thrusting out her chest; she nodded to her acquaintances and walked away to the other drawing-room, unattainable and unusual.

After this meeting Alexei Petrovich lived for several days in the wonderful world of perfumes. Nothing existed for him that was not like the perfume of the handkerchief that had been dropped on Anna Semyonovna's lap and at even the faintest suggestion of that perfume Alexei Petrovich's eyes grew dark and he felt a clutching at his heart.

Sitting in his three-room bachelor flat on the ground floor of a house on Fontanka, near the Summer Garden, Alexei Petrovich would stare distraught at walls that had bullet holes in them from times when he held stag parties there; he would sit down at the table on which a number of women's photographs were standing, lie on the leather couch, whistle a Chopin tune—everywhere he could see the pale profile with its tender mouth and eyes that seemed to be filmed over by some great warmth. . . . Even his batman, who usually sang soldiers' songs in a womanish voice in the kitchen, did not bother him any more.

When large snowflakes began to fall outside Alexei Petrovich pressed his forehead to the window-pane, gazed at the soft quivering blanket that was falling from heaven and then shouted suddenly to his batman:

"My greatcoat and cap, quickly!"

Such is the snow when it spreads over heaven and earth and houses, when women bury themselves in their winter coats, warming their shoulders and bosoms in the sweet-smelling furs, when a horse comes flying out of the blizzard with its tail outstretched in the wind and disappears again so swiftly that you scarcely have time to see who is sitting in the low sleigh—then is the time to stand on watch at the corner to see who will come flying past, dark eyes in a rosy face flashing out from

under a hood. This is the time to mount a fast horse, bury your face in your collar and set out wondering whom you will meet that evening, to whom you will lose your heart.

Alexei Petrovich walked swiftly along the embankment, his fur-lined greatcoat flying open. The snow melted on his cheeks and the merry rattle of his spurs egged him on. He stopped at the Hermitage Bridge and there realized that he was on his way to Princess Matskaya's house.

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled and looked round.

The thick snow dimmed the light of the street lamps, it lay on cornices and statues, piled up cushions on the dark granite. There were no people abroad on foot: the windows of the palace were dark; the sentry at the entrance stood motionless, closely wrapped in his long sheepskin coat with his rifle pressed tight to his side.

Suddenly he heard a shout and a black horse, covered in lather and snow, came flying on to the Hermitage Bridge throwing its legs out in great strides. Seated in the narrow sleigh behind the driver's broad back was Anna Semyonovna, leaning forward in her dark sables. . . .

Alexei Petrovich, raising his hand to his tall beaver cap, stood watching where the sleigh disappeared into the blizzard. His greatcoat slipped from his shoulders, exposing the gold braid on his tunic, and the cold seemed to chill his heart. . . .

The next day Alexei Petrovich paid the Mordvinskys a visit. Blushing and confused he explained to the husband that he had the honour of paying his respects to the very worthy Anna Semyonovna whom he had met at the princess' and as he made his explanations he waited wondering whether she would come out of her rooms. Mordvinsky listened to the prince coldly, with knitted brows, never once raising his eyes. He was tall, stout and stoop-

ing, and Alexei Petrovich, looking at his sallow face with a nose like the beak of a bird of prey and his drooping moustaches, imagined how he would frown after the departure of the guest knowing that he would have to return this unnecessary visit.

Mordvinsky, however, did not return the visit and Alexei Petrovich, after waiting a week, resolved to say something impertinent to him at the first opportunity and to fight him.

Some time later as he was leaving a drawing-room he met Anna Semyonovna in the doorway. She raised her blue eyes and smiled. He stood stock-still as though held there by a great force.

For some six weeks he searched for Mordvinskaya in the drawing-rooms, at balls and *soirées* and at evening services in fashionable churches. He would not have dreamed that he could suffer so. He had become accustomed to think of her constantly with great concentration as he would of a sickness. When he entered a drawing-room he always knew whether she was there before he saw her. One day when she came suddenly upon him from behind he shuddered and turned round opening his eyes wide.

"It seems you are afraid of me?" she asked.

Those were her first words addressed to him apart from small talk.

Anna Semyonovna probably paid more attention to him than to others but he considered himself insignificant and unworthy. His feeling no longer pleased him: it was involuntary in him, it seared him and sapped his strength. It was not for nothing that the people said love is like a snake.

Then suddenly (in the way he usually had) Alexei Petrovich confessed everything to an officer with whom he was but slightly acquainted and who was received by Mordvinsky. The officer gnawed at his moustache and

listened attentively (they were seated in a tavern and Rumanian singers close by drowned their words); the next day the officer told Mordvinskaya everything.

On that memorable evening they met at a ball. Alexei Petrovich, grown thin and serious, passed through the crowd of uniforms, dress-coats and ladies' evening gowns glancing from under drawn brows; he clanked his spurs, bowed and immediately turned away, persistently seeking her, as though he feared he would not recognize her or would make a mistake.

Anna Semyonovna stood by a column. She was wearing a dress of green silk, simple and open, with a huge pink rose on the skirt.

"I must have a long talk with you," said Anna Semyonovna to the prince, who, pressing his lips to her hand, neither saw nor heard anything else. He felt heavy at heart, he was sad almost to the point of tears—it was a feeling of mingled fear and joy.

"Don't be angry with me," he said softly.

They passed through the ball-room into the winter garden.

Anna Semyonovna sat down on a bench against a wall of irregular undressed stone. The stones and the ledges were covered with ivy, from above hung the strands of some creeping plants; on either side of the bench palms reached up to the glass ceiling throwing no shadows in the even light which flooded the whole place and lit the trees and flowers, the bubbling fountain and the whole fine, angry figure of Anna Semyonovna. She struck her fan against the palm of her hand, laughed and said:

"I hear you've been saying disrespectful things about me, is this true?"

Alexei Petrovich sighed and lowered his head. Anna Semyonovna continued:

"You don't answer; does that mean it's true?"

He parted his dry lips and muttered something incomprehensible.

"What, what?!" she exclaimed and suddenly added with unexpected calm, "You see for yourself I'm not very angry with you."

These words seemed to him to contain both ridicule and a peculiarly feminine kind of sympathy—it was so easy to cure sadness in this way. All his thoughts were in a turmoil, he felt that he would forget himself, and then all would be lost.

Just then Mordvinsky came in; seeing the prince he made a sour face and said to his wife:

"I have received a dispatch, I am leaving."

"Yes, but I don't read your dispatches," answered Anna Semyonovna. "The prince will see me home."

Mordvinsky bowed and left. There was a promise in that short word "prince." Anna Semyonovna took his arm and they returned to the ball-room where dancing was in full swing. There Alexei Petrovich seemed to have become suddenly intoxicated and told her laughingly how he had been spending the days. Anna Semyonovna twitched her brows slightly whenever he gazed too intently into her eyes.

They left at three in the morning. When she entered her car Anna Semyonovna raised her grey fur coat exposing to the knee a leg in a white stocking through which the skin was visible. . . . Alexei Petrovich closed his eyes. As he sat beside her on the soft bouncing cushions he seemed to see all of her from the white stockings to the diamond necklace at her throat; he leaned back in silence and felt that her eyes, light and cold from the street lamps that flashed past, were following his every movement.

At last the silence became unbearable. He thrust a finger into his collar and pulled, ripping the hooks and buttons off his fur-bordered tunic.

“There’s no need to get excited,” said Anna Semyonovna. Her white gloved hand wiped the sweating glass of the window and she added softly, “I will not refuse you anything.”

It may have been a whim on the part of Anna Semyonovna or she had gone too far in the game; whatever it was they caressed each other until five o’clock in the morning, at first in the car and then in Alexei Petrovich’s rooms, pausing only for breath. . . .

When Anna Semyonovna entered his bedroom she exclaimed, “What a narrow bed,” and those were her only words.

In the bedroom, lighted only by the lamp before a golden icon, she threw her coat, dress and perfumed underclothes on to a chair and on the carpet. Alexei Petrovich touched the things as she threw them down, swaying like a drunkard and then lay back again hurriedly on the pillows looking seriously at the young woman who seemed more beautiful than ever in the half light and, in order to make sure that it was not a dream, he pressed his lips to hers and forgot himself in the kiss.

That night was the turning point in Alexei Petrovich’s life. He learned suffering, incomparable joy and he lost his will-power. With every passing hour of the following day he was more impatient to repeat that which had been. If it had been necessary he would have consented to take service with her as a coachman or footman. He would have touched her things, looked at her, listened, kissed the seat of the chair on which she had sat.

But Alexei Petrovich was neither a coachman nor a footman. And Anna Semyonovna did not appoint a place for another meeting.

A day, a sleepless night and another day passed full of alarm. . . . That evening there was a charity bazaar at the Assembly of the Nobility. Alexei Petrovich had scarcely entered the huge hall before he saw her behind a counter.

Anna Semyonovna was selling coarse lace and peasant embroidery. On her right stood her husband and on the left the anaemic young diplomat was twirling a monocle.

It was as though the sun had lit up everything all round him when Alexei Petrovich walked up to the counter smiling broadly. Anna Semyonovna glanced at the newcomer, raised her brows sharply, lowered her eyes and turned to the anaemic young diplomat. Alexei Petrovich felt a catch in his breath. He bowed. She did not offer him her hand. Her husband scarcely answered the bow.

Alexei Petrovich spent the whole evening wandering about, pushed here and there by the crowd, buying useless things, carried them around and then left them on window-sills, made a circle and each time stopped near the stall where lace was being sold. Anna Semyonovna was surrounded by officers and he could hear her laughter. An hour before closing time he looked for Mordvinskaya's coat in the cloak-room. When she appeared on the staircase leaning on her husband's arm Alexei Petrovich went up to her and, not looking at her so as not to see her cold eyes, spoke about the sale of lace. She did not answer. The attendant, throwing her overshoes on to the carpet, helped her on with her coat. Alexei Petrovich bent down to the grey overshoes, turned back the skirt of her coat slightly and began to put them on, realizing full well that he was doing a terrible thing. He bent lower and lower over her sheer blue stocking, wittily touched her leg with his lips, rose rapidly, his face a deep red, and saw Mordvinsky, fully dressed, looking at his wife's feet with a strange sneer on his face. . . .

That was the beginning of the dreadful catastrophe after which Alexei Petrovich left the regiment and fled to the Miloye estate which he had inherited from Grandmother Krasnopolskaya who had died in the spring somewhere at a German spa.

The catastrophe was the end of Alexei Petrovich's youth and it now seemed to him that there was no getting away from this life, tedious and illusory. Perhaps a new love would help him. But he felt that his heart was torn and half dead and that in order to love again he would have to be born again.

III

In order not to be alone with his venomous recollections Alexei Petrovich invited guests to his house, every evening the same ones. The guests came at dusk—the Rtishchev brothers in a two-wheeled gig, old Obrastsov in a wicker tarantass and last of all Tsuryupa, a merchant's son who had acquired some good manners abroad, came in a cabriolet. Today was no exception.

At the appointed hour the footman went upstairs to Alexei Petrovich and pushing open the bedroom door saw the prince lying with his head on the window-sill.

Alexei Petrovich did not immediately hear the call to dinner or the announcement that the guests had arrived. The draught from the open door lifted his hair. He looked round, screwed up his eyes painfully in the light of the flickering chandeliers in the footman's hand and said, "Let the guests sit down to table."

They usually dined in the grand hall. Along all four walls and at a sufficient distance from them to leave a passageway were two rows of round pillars; six windows behind the columns opened into the garden; in the opposite wall there were false windows with mirrors in place of window-panes; between the columns stood upholstered settees with no backs. . . .

When the footman announced that dinner was ready the Rtishchev brothers, Tsuryupa and Obrastsov got up from the settees, grunting and rubbing their hands; they sat down to table and with their elbows shifted the

crystal and china on the snow-white table-cloth. The Rtishchev brothers always sat side by side—their broad backs were clothed in grey high-necked jackets with Caucasian buttons, both had shaggy moustaches, snub noses, faces betokening excellent health and cowl-like eyes. The brothers were shy and waited until Tsurypa, who took the place of the host at the head of the table, took the first helping. Bald-headed Obraztsov, pursing his lips in anticipation, let his aged eyes, dull from gout, roam over the board.

"You will serve the same champagne as yesterday," ordered Tsurypa, thrusting out his lower lip. He was in evening-dress and a red handkerchief was thrust into his waistcoat as though about to take the sacrament at mass.

"And the cherry liqueur, sweetheart, you've forgotten to serve it, remember I asked you for it yesterday?" said Obraztsov.

"Yes, sir," answered the footman gloomily.

Just then a cook-boy brought in the soup. The Rtishchevs, Ivan and Semyon, spoke together, nudging each other:

"The best thing's plain vodka, your belly rumbles from champagne. Semyon, pass me the mushrooms, and pour me a glass."

Tsurypa, blinking with his lashless eyelids, ate little and did not talk; he was reserving his wit until the prince arrived.

Obraztsov tucked a napkin under his chin and sipped his soup with pleasure, the bags under his eyes quivering as he ate.

"They are right," he said, nodding towards the brothers. "Our Public Prosecutor got dangerously ill from champagne—such terrible wind he had. But, of course, you can't keep on drinking nothing but vodka and vodka."

Tsuryupa guffawed shrilly and rolled a little ball of bread along the table. The Rtishchev brothers laid down their forks, opened their mouths and laughed, the laughter pouring out, as if from a barrel.

"My brother was a regular joker," continued Obraztsov, "he'd say things that would make the ladies leave."

The footman and the boy carried round the food and drinks. Moths flying over the chandelier burned their wings and fell on to the table. The guests ate in silence, only Ivan and Semyon occasionally sighed noisily from overindulgence.

At last the well-known limping gait was heard outside. Tsuryupa hurriedly wiped his mouth with his napkin and pulling out his monocle threw it into his flat eye socket. The prince entered. His eyes were bloodshot, his damp hair had just been combed back; in his reserved movements and in the cut of his clothes Tsuryupa saw for the hundredth time an inexplicable elegance; in order to imitate him he had bought a triple mirror, had ordered clothes and linen from London and had driven away all his relatives, petty merchants, so that they should not hamper his style.

"Don't get up, don't get up, my friends," said the prince as he greeted them. "I hope the cook has corrected yesterday's mistakes."

The Rtishchevs showed their breeding by clicking their heels under their chairs, Obraztsov stretched out to kiss the prince and Tsuryupa jumped to his feet, unable to restrain himself from clapping the prince on the shoulder.

Alexei Petrovich sat down at the corner of the table, took a piece of bread and ate it. Wine was poured for him and he drank it avidly. He leaned his elbows on the table and touched his cheeks with his fingers:

"Tell me what has been happening lately. And please, some more wine."

"You yourself are ever new," said Tsuruyupa. "Incidentally, I have a new yarn."

He leaned towards the prince's ear and choking with laughter began to tell him the story. The prince smiled, the Rtishchev brothers laughed and their foreheads wrinkled as they tried to think of something amusing to tell but all that could come to their minds were dogs, damage to the hayfields, a lame shaft-horse—all topics badly suited to such high society.

"Since the talk has turned to girls," said Obratzsov, "our dear prince is in his element. He will treat us."

"Yes, yes, you must," shouted the guests, "let the prince get us some nice girlies."

"We'd better go to Kolyvan, gentlemen."

"To the inn! Let's go to Sasha's!"

"That's not like a friend—all the fun for yourself and nothing for us, no, let it be Kolyvan! To Kolyvan!"

The prince frowned. The Rtishchev brothers stamped with their heavy jackboots, perspired and shouted, "To Kolyvan! To Kolyvan!" Tsuruyupa leaned to the prince's ear and whispered, "It's not nice, Prince, it's not nice." Obratzsov wiped his bald head with his napkin and stuck out the tip of his tongue, growing quite limp at the idea of Kolyvan. They were all drunk. The prince, leaning on the table, dropped his head. The wine he had drunk, and the lingering effects of that of the day before, filled his head like a stuffy cloud. "Today I must get drunker than ever," he thought and smiled; Tsuruyupa took him by the elbow as he got up.

"Come into the garden," said the prince.

The footman immediately threw open the balcony doors, the cool of the evening entered the room and the guests walked down the steps into the damp garden.

The sand path from the balcony led to a gully along the edge of which, half hidden in the shrubbery of briars, was a balustrade with a single remaining stone vase.

The light from the six windows of the hall fell on the vase, on half a dozen balusters visible through the foliage, on the trees and the path. Below the cliff red and yellow warning lights were burning on the wide, scarcely visible river.

"We'll have to persuade the brothers to wrestle," whispered Tsurypa to the prince who had leaned his cheek against the vase and was gazing at the Volga thinking, "Today, today by all means, surely I do not lack the courage."

"Persuade them," answered the prince.

The wine did not intoxicate him immediately. At first he was cautious as though forewarned of something, then he grew sorrowful almost to tears: every sound seemed distinct, things grew clear and over everything there seemed to hover a fatal end. Suddenly, like lightning breaking through a heavy cloud, he felt a sharp pain in his heart that ran down his back to his cold feet: he shook himself and the debauchery began.

While the prince had been standing at the balustrade Tsurypa had been egging the brothers on with caustic words and Ivan Rtishchev was already looking askance at Semyon.

The Rtishchevs were famous throughout the district for their strength, and at horse-fairs had often challenged some Tatar horse-coper to a wrestling match between the carts in front of an audience of landowners and peasants. When no opponents could be found the brothers usually fought each other.

"Semyon could throw you," whispered Tsurypa, nudging Ivan.

"Of course I can," answered Semyon, and Ivan was already making for his brother who thrust out his chest and snorted.

"Ugh, cowards!" exclaimed Tsurypa and winked at Obraztsov, who began pushing Ivan forward with his

shoulder, and with all his strength shoved Semyon between the shoulders.

The brothers snorted and clashed. Ivan seized Semyon by the waist. "Not playing fair!" exclaimed Semyon and, squatting down, lifted his brother who waved his legs in the air. Then they seized each other and whirled round breathing heavily. Tsur'yupa ran round them clapping his hands. The brothers staggered towards the brink of the gully, Tsur'yupa put out his foot and tripped Semyon who let go of Ivan and both of them, crashing to the ground, rolled down the side of the gully roaring and tearing the bushes.

Alexei Petrovich laughed loudly. The cloud that had oppressed his heart had gone. Roaring with laughter he supported himself on the edge of the cold vase.

At his call a footman and the gardener came running with ropes and dragged the brothers out of the gully, panting, happy and scratched. They immediately began chasing Tsur'yupa, who ran away across the wet grass in his patent-leather boots, shrieking piercingly in an unnatural voice. . . .

A harnessed carriage was already at the door. A crate of wine was placed in the bottom of the carriage and the brothers were seated on it back to back. Obraztsov squeezed on to the seat between Tsur'yupa and the prince. The prince pushed his hat over his eyes, Tsur'yupa shouted "Away!" and the horses raced downhill to the ferry and into Kolyvan.

IV

Sasha stood in the middle of a clean room that was now filled with tobacco smoke, her arms, bare to the elbow, folded under her green-clad breast.

Her sweet face with its straight velvety eyebrows was turned towards the prince, love for him streaming from

her dark eyes. Sasha had just finished singing, she had paused for breath, her mouth half open and her amber beads trembling at her neck.

“Sing again, again, Sasha!” shouted the guests. Sasha smiled, nodded her head and began singing softly in a low voice as though her soul were weeping in her bosom:

*Wormwood, wormwood,
Bitt'rest of grasses,
My hand did not plant you,
I did not sow you,
You, alone, from nothing,
Born in the world,
And in our green garden,
Spread 'midst the flowers. . .*

The prince rested his elbows on the bare boards of the table, clutched his aching head and listened attentively. Obraztsov walked up and down the room past Sasha, snapping his fingers and rolling his eyes. The Rtishchevs, their jackets unbuttoned, sat on a bench. Tsurypa stretched out his legs, thrust his hands into his pockets and sat swaying back and forth.

Sasha finished the song. The prince immediately asked her in a hoarse voice:

“What about that other one, Sasha, you remember the one I mean?”

“It's no good,” said Sasha. “It's not a true song and I don't like it. But for you—”

She lowered her eyelashes, took a deep breath and began to sing in a sad voice:

*It wasn't in Moscow, it happened in Peter,
In one of the famous streets,
Where there lived a woman who killed her
own husband,
Killed him stone-dead with a knife.*

"Sasha!" shouted the prince, repeating the last lines of the song. "That's fine—'her right elbow on the window-sill, her burning tears o'er the window-sill'—but the thing's done and her lover waits under the window mocking at the old husband. Now sing the one, I like the details:

*Around the neck,
A noose she made,
To her lover
The rope she gave. . .*

"It's just right—for today. Just as though it were written specially for us. Go on, Sasha."

Sasha was frightened but she continued singing:

*A very strong knot,
It won't give way,
On that old neck
It won't give way.
The old man groans
As though he would sleep,
Legs beat the floor
As though he would creep,
Arms all outstretched
Starting to dance,
Teeth are all bared,
He's grinning askance.*

"Alexei Petrovich, I'd better sing something livelier," she said, breaking off suddenly.

The prince pushed the table away and began to clap his hands and stamp on the floor. Sasha twirled round, threw out her arms and began singing couplets to a dance-tune.

Her red petticoats belled out and below them her legs in white stockings and kid boots swam over the floor in a dance.

Obraztsov minced around Sasha shouting, "Look at her! Look!" Ivan Rtishchev, unable to restrain himself, put his hands on his hips and launched forth into the squatting dance, throwing out his coat-tails. Tsuryupa, giggling, pulled the kerchief off Sasha's head.

"Leave her alone, you lout!" shouted the prince.

Sasha's little head with its black plaits turned on its full neck like a sunflower towards the sun—her sun was the prince. He sat there pale and drunk, his mouth parched. Suddenly Sasha, pirouetting, dropped on to the bench where the prince was sitting and pressed close to his shoulder throwing her arms round his neck.

"Girls!" roared the Rtishchev brothers. "Get some girls!"

Tsuryupa, insulted, went into the other room and lay down on Sasha's bed, striving not to crumple his jacket.

"A nice story," he muttered, wiping his face with a handkerchief. "Something to talk about, how our dear prince enjoys himself. That's the reputed fiancé. . . 'Lout.' I'll make him remember the lout. Ugh, you're all swine!"

Just then the door was thrown open, the bedroom was lit up, Obraztsov came flying out of the noise and tobacco smoke, made for the entrance and disappeared into the yard.

"Gone for girls," continued Tsuryupa. "Just wait a bit, I'll arrange a ball. I'll throw meat to these dogs—I'll get Shishkin's Chorus from Moscow. And if Shishkin isn't good enough I'll get Chaliapin himself. . . Honour's a fine thing but you all love money."

For a long time Tsuryupa lay thinking what staggering stunts he could arrange to get the better of the gentry. At last four peasant women whose husbands were away in the army came in from the yard, whispering and holding on to each other, Obraztsov urging them on.

"What are you scared of, you fools," he whispered loudly. "We're not going to eat you, we'll give you something sweet to drink, and warm ourselves up."

The door closed behind the women. From the room came the howling and the horse-laugh of the Rtishchevs. Sasha and the prince came into the bedroom immediately.

"Where are you going, darling? Don't go," said Sasha.

The prince did not answer but went out on to the porch. An earthenware wash-basin hung from a post. In the half light that came through the door Tsurypa could see the prince—he took water up in the palm of the hand, splashed it over his face and then wiped himself. Sasha, holding on to the other post, continued pleading with him.

"She's young and she'll soon get over her love; I don't want anything from you and when you're drunk I'll put you to bed. Don't go. . . . Go tomorrow, if you must, darling."

"Stop it. What are you talking about, you must be drunk yourself!" answered the prince.

Sasha did not answer him. The prince took a deep breath, called for his carriage and went down the steps. Sasha remained standing at the post. The horses arrived, the driver coaxing them. The gates of the yard creaked and the prince's voice said:

"Volkovo."

The carriage rolled away. Sasha left the post and sat down on the steps where Alexei Petrovich had walked. Her dark immobile figure, her elbows on her knees and bare head lowered, above her the irregular line formed by the roofs of the outbuildings and the pole over the well—all this could be clearly seen in the darkness through the rectangle of the door.

It all seemed so commonplace and boring to Tsurypa that he began to frown as he thought: "Russian land-

scape, to hell with it all. I'll go to Paris for good, I've got money enough, haven't I? And as for the prince, I'll see that the proper person knows about this. He's a real blackguard."

Behind the door the feet beat ever louder on the floor, there were roars of laughter and shrieks, they were making merry.

KATYA

I

Alexander Vadimych gave his daughter his blessing, kissed her and then went in his slippers to the sofa where a bed had been prepared for him.

Katya closed the door of the study and wrapping a shawl round her shoulders went out into the hall. The moonlight made a pattern of the window-frames on the old parquet floor. The corners of the hall, where the settees stood, were in darkness. Looking at the squares of moonlight on the floor Katya raised her hand to her cheek and smiled so tenderly that her heart leaped and then stood still.

"It's still early!" she thought. "Perhaps he's waiting? No, no, I must have more patience."

She lifted the sides of her skirt, rolled her eyes, and began to twirl round.

At that moment a door slammed not far away; Katya immediately sank to the floor; Kondraty, carrying a candle and Volkov's clothes, was coming along the wall.

Seeing the girl on the floor he stopped and munched with his lips.

"I thought it was a ghost," said Katya, her laughter breaking through her speech. "And it's only you, Kondraty. I've lost a ring, come and look for it."

Kondraty came and bent down to the floor with his candle.

"What ring? There's no ring here."

Katya laughed and ran into the corridor. Behind the door she stuck her tongue out at Kondraty and stamping deliberately went in the direction of her own room but before she got to the end of the corridor, to the place where a carpet hung on the wall, she hid in a window recess and covered her mouth to check her laughter.

When Kondraty's grunting and footsteps had died away Katya tiptoed back to the hall and slipped out into the garden through the balcony door. Under the dark trees she stopped—a sudden sadness had overtaken her.

"I expect he's getting tired of me," she thought. "And if he isn't, he soon will be. What does he see in me? Could I ever be a comfort to him? He has suffered so much and I have nothing but foolishness to offer him. Some heroine!"

She became so miserable that she sat down on a bank of turf. "A real heroine doesn't eat, tosses the bedclothes about at night, and roses lie on her breast, not like me - I sleep soundly with my nose stuck in the pillow. . . ."

Katyenka suddenly laughed out loud. The sadness, however, had not left her. Far away the frogs in the pond croaked and screeched. The grass between the long black shadows of the trees looked grey in the moonlight.

Katya suddenly stretched her neck and listened, then ran along the avenue of trees holding on to the ends of her shawl. A spider's web clung to her cheek. She brushed it away and there, where the avenue turned along the pond, she cut across the currant bushes, catching her skirts in them, and took the shortest path to the boardwalk by the water. The moon stood high behind the summer-house throwing its light on the water and the shiny leaves of the water-lilies. At the folding table in the summer-house, where they usually drank tea with

their guests, sat Alexei Petrovich, his cheeks in his cupped hands. Katyenka got the impression that his wide, staring eyes were gazing but seeing nothing.

"What's the matter with him?" she thought quickly and called, "Alexei Petrovich!"

The prince started violently and rose. Katya said laughingly, "Sleeping, sleeping! How disgraceful!" She ran to him along the rocking boards.

Alexei Petrovich pressed his lips to her hand and spoke in a hoarse voice:

"Thank you, thank you!"

"Have you been thinking about yourself again?" Katya asked him affectionately as she sat down on the bench with her elbow on the decrepit balustrade. "I asked you not to think any more. You're very good, I know that, anyway."

"No," answered Alexei Petrovich softly but firmly. "Katya, my dear, it's very, very hard for me. Just to think of what I am doing. . . . Do you love me a little bit?"

Katya smiled and turned her head away, but she did not answer him. The prince was sitting beside her, looking at her hair where it lay on the nape of her neck and at her oval cheek that was reflected so clearly in the water. Higher up above her head a spider was hanging in its web snare.

"On the way here I was thinking whether I should tell you or not. If I don't tell you I shall probably never dare come here again, and if I tell you, you will turn away from me, it will be very hard for you but you will try to forget me. . . . What should I do?"

"Tell me," said Katya very seriously.

"And you won't think that I am lying or pretending?"

"No, I won't think that."

"I have done many bad things but there is one of them that worries me constantly," said the prince with diffi-

culty and with a hoarse note to his voice. "That's what always happens: you think that you have already forgotten and then the rotten thing that you did so long ago develops into such a definite rottenness that you can't bear it any longer."

"Please, tell me," repeated Katya; her hands, holding the ends of her shawl, trembled.

"That's just what I thought, I must tell you everything. This happened a long time ago. No, it wasn't so very long ago, just last year. I met a lady. . . . She was very beautiful. But that's not what gave her such power. She used extraordinary perfume that had an inexpressible odour of depravity about it. You see, Katya, what I'm telling you. Don't do that. . . . Don't look away from me. . . . Until I met her I had never loved anybody. I had always thought that women were of the same nature as we are. That's not true. Women, Katya, live amongst us but they are very peculiar and very dangerous beings. And in addition this one was depraved and as sensuous as an insect. A depraved woman is a horrible thing. I lived like one enthralled, after that meeting. I felt as if I had been badly burned."

Alexei Petrovich broke off suddenly and raised his fingers to his temples.

"I'm not saying what I want to. I am tormenting you. That is all the past, you must understand. Now I hate her with all my heart. . . . She bewitched me, she possessed me and then threw me off like an old glove. I lost my senses and began to pursue her. It was as though I were thirsty and somebody had given me water only to take it away again as my lips touched it - I reached out for it, my mouth was as parched as though it had a fire in it. . . . One evening, after a ball, I kissed her in sheer desperation, or perhaps out of sheer devilry, in full view of everybody. Next day I met the lady's husband and he invited me to his house for some tickets or other. I

realized what he was inviting me for and went. It was a frosty morning and I remember how sad the snow made me feel. Her husband sat at the table in his study and dropped his head the moment I entered. He was holding a silver cigarette-case in his fat hands. I watched his short chilly fingers as they tried to extract a cigarette but could not, they were trembling too much. I afterwards bought the same brand of cigarettes. Lying on the papers on the table there was a whip bound round with white wire. I stood in front of him and still he kept looking at the cigarettes. Suddenly I said to him jauntily, 'Good-morning, and where are your tickets?' and held my hand out almost touching the cigarette-case, but he did not offer his hand, his fat face shook and he said, 'I find your behaviour dishonourable and disgusting.' Then I shouted at him although I do not think it was very loud, 'How dare you!' He shuddered like one in a fever, his face twitched and he seized the whip and struck me in the face. I did not move, did not feel any pain. I noticed that two buttons of his waistcoat were unfastened, like those of a fat man usually are. 'Take that,' he said, leaning across the table and slashing at my collar for I was looking him straight in the eyes. I hastily thrust my hand into my pocket and pulled out a revolver. A revolver also appeared in his hand and he moved towards me; he was even smiling from anger and I could see the leaden bullets in the dark chambers of his revolver. . . . It was awful! I felt that I could not die and could not kill, I backed away and tripped over the carpet near the mirror. In the mirror I saw the open door and there the lady was standing, wearing a hat and long gloves. Her lips were pressed together and she was following our movements closely. 'I'll send my seconds,' I said. The husband stamped his foot and screamed, 'I'll give you seconds, you pup! Get out of here!' I closed my eyes and raised the revolver. He struck me on the arm

and then in the eyes and I fell on the carpet. Then I got up, went into the hall and put on my coat. He stood in the door with his whip in his hand, as though I were a guest he was seeing off, but he did not hit me again."

Alexei Petrovich stopped for breath but began again immediately:

"There was only one thing for me to do. For three days I lay on the bed in a fever, my face to the wall. I could not sleep and recalled everything just as it had happened: how I went there, how he held the cigarette-case, all my own words, the way he struck me. . . . I began to roll about and think things over: What ought I to have done? What should I do at this moment, for instance, to get even with him? I sat on the bed and ground my teeth. But my will-power was gone. I knew that I ought to get up and go out to buy a new revolver (I had left the old one in his hall) and then should go there and kill him. But I could not do it, I tossed about on the bed and stared at the wall-paper. At last I came to the conclusion that I had to think about something else: I began to think of my regiment and of the village in which I used to spend my leave. I was sorry for myself, I wept and then fell asleep. I woke up the next morning feeling just as sorry for myself. I did not want to believe that something evil had happened. That which I had still to do was far worse. Until a short time before I had been free but now I had to go through with this to the end, I could not avoid it. The worst thing was that I had no choice. I dressed, went out into the street, raised my collar and took a passing cab, gave the driver the address of my armourer's shop but then I changed my mind: a revolver would not do for that purpose, it would be better to stab him with my sword. . . . I got out of the cab near his house and began to pace up and down the street.

"I remember that an old general with side whiskers and a purple nose passed me. The weather was clear and

frosty. 'I must ask his pardon,' I thought, 'then everything will be all right again. No, no. People are unkind, they are wicked and vindictive, they must be insulted, beaten, humiliated. . . .' Just then an army officer ran into me, a rosy-cheeked boy, pushed me and apologized politely. But I had already lost my head, and shouted after him, 'Fool!' The officer was extremely embarrassed but seeing that I was staring straight at him he frowned, raised his little snub-nosed face to me and said, 'My dear sir. . .' and a lot more. I insulted him and immediately challenged him to a duel. We fought the next morning and he shot me in the leg. The poor boy was so distressed about the whole affair that he sat down beside me and cried. I lay on the snow with my face towards the clear, blue sky. I felt great peace. . . . That's all."

Katya did not speak for a long time, hiding her hands under her shawl; then she asked sharply:

"And that woman?"

Alexei Petrovich jumped up from the bench and fell at Katyenka's feet, resting his forehead on her knees.

"Katyusha darling," he said despairingly, "have you forgiven me? Have you understood? It is not so easy. . . . Do I disgust you?"

"It is all very painful to me," answered Katya, pulling her knees away. "Please leave me and don't come . . . for a few days."

She got up. She offered her fingers to the prince to kiss, turned away and walked slowly along the boardwalk on the bank of the pond towards the dark trees. Behind the trees her dress, white in the moonlight, disappeared in the shadows.

Alexei Petrovich gazed for a long time at the place where she had disappeared, then went down the steps to the water and began pouring it in handfuls over his head and face.

Katya went to her room on tiptoe, lit the candles in front of her dressing-table mirror, threw down her shawl, unbuttoned and took off her blouse and removed her hairpins—her hair fell over her shoulders and bosom.

But the comb trembled in her hand, she pressed the soft hair to her face and sank into a semi-circular armchair.

During the past hour she had heard and experienced so much that although she still did not know what was right and what was evil, she already knew and felt that a misfortune had occurred.

No more than an hour before she had thought that she and the prince were alone in the whole world and that no one had ever loved so sweetly before. In the same way as her heavy hair pulled down her head so she felt the full weight of love pulling at her heart. Before this love she had not lived. And could have the prince really lived before he knew her? He had appeared suddenly and he, the whole of him, was nobody's but Katya's. That had been but an hour before.

"Oh, it's all so monstrous," she whispered. "To tell the whole story in such detail! The dirt will stick, it will not wash off. He has always been sad, is that why? Of course, he still loves her. Of course he does, otherwise he would not be so distressed, he would not have told me. And he was struck in the face, in the eyes, in his eyes. . . . I did not even dare to kiss them. . . . And he did nothing, did not attack him, did not kill him. Impotent, contemptible. . . . But no, no . . . if he were contemptible he would not have told me. And he lay there alone and distraught for three days. Eyes full of sorrow and torment. I would have sat on his bed, taken his head between my hands and pressed it to me. . . . Alone, alone with his sorrow and troubles. . . . And nobody, of course,

who understood or was sorry for him. But I won't let him be hurt. I'll go to that woman and tell her what she is. . . . Oh, my God, my God, what shall I do?"

Katya ran her tongue over her dry lips and stared into the mirror with dark, unseeing eyes. With a slow movement she threw her hair on to her bare back. The slope of her shoulders and arms, and the tops of her firm breasts, half hidden in lace, were white as marble. Her cheeks were flaming. At last she saw herself and smiled proudly.

"Here I am," she thought. "Nobody has ever touched me and nobody would dare, and he—he's unclean and beaten."

She stood up quickly, undressed, and slowly plaited her hair; when she had finished plaiting it she stood still for a moment thinking, tossed her head and then got into bed.

Another mirror on the wall, an oval one, reflected the low, wide bed with carved legs that had been her grandmother's and Katya's flushed face and tightly pressed contemptuous lips on the pillows. Her lips trembled and she whispered:

"And I, too, will hurt him," and turning swiftly over on her face she cried like a little girl, her shoulders heaving.

After her tears Katya dozed off. In her high, white room two candles were burning, casting dark, warm shadows from the furniture on to the carpet. It was so quiet that one might have expected the dress, thrown on to a chair, to rustle all by itself. A cricket in one corner began its dry, tiresome chirp.

Then, from behind the bed, appeared a tall, red mannikin, dry as a straw. Without touching the floor he began jumping up and down and kicking his legs; in his hands he held thin wires. The wires flew out and entangled Katya and still the mannikin kept bouncing up and down.

Then the blanket began to roll up and lay on her

breast as heavy as a stone. Her legs refused to move. Thin red wires and rings twirled over her head, joining together and moving apart again. . . . The mannikin jumped on her chest and seized her by the throat. . . .

Katya screamed and lifted herself up on the pillows. With her outstretched arms she tried to push the weight off herself. The light from the candles stabbed her eyes and she fell back again. . . . Fever began to burn her up.

DENUNCIATION

I

That night Alexander Vadimych had slept well—the mosquitoes did not bite him and he awoke early as was his habit.

Opening his sleepy eyes Alexander Vadimych stretched out his hand for the jug of kvass, took a drink, grunted, turned over on to his back making the springs of the mattress creak, pulled a savage face and with a shout of "Shoot!" sat up and dropped his feet straight into his felt slippers.

After this he decided to sit still for a moment and looked round the room with some satisfaction. The study was old and worn, nothing in it had been changed since his father's death; on one wall hung a horse-collar, a painted shaft-bow and a set of harness that Alexei Orlov had presented to his great-grandfather. Against the opposite wall stood a stuffed dog and a Circassian saddle on a stand. In one corner was a heap of sample scythes, sickles and spades. Nailed up over the sofa were pictures of his favourite horses and on the writing-desk were bound files of an agricultural paper for many years, all kinds of seeds in papers, bills, a pile of cigarette-ends and similar rubbish.

Alexander Vadimych was bored during the winter months when the place was snowed under, when the blizzards howled and raged and he thought up various things to keep him busy, ordering the things from Berlin or Moscow. . . . Once he got hold of a machine for sharpening pencils and Kondraty hunted broken pencils everywhere and brought them to his master. Then Alexander Vadimych began to take an interest in photography and the place was littered with negatives and acid in measuring-glasses. Another winter he cut out model farmhouses, mills and farm machines from cardboard and pasted them together. On one occasion he heard from a visiting surveyor that electricity could be produced at home, ordered everything necessary and after considerable trouble rigged up electric light in his study; he even promised Katyenka to lay electric light to her room but the summer distracted Alexander Vadimych's attention from this plan—with the first gurgle of the spring-waters he felt the blood coursing through his veins and gave himself up entirely to noble occupations: in March he paired the horses, in April he paved the dam, in May he raced his horses and then came the mowing, reaping and threshing, and then autumn, when everybody was properly drunk and there were weddings everywhere.

Alexander Vadimych got fed up with sitting on the bed and called out loudly:

“Kondraty! My trousers!”

Kondraty came into the room carrying a pair of wide trousers.

“A happy rising!” he said as he bowed.

“Well, is everything all right?” asked Alexander Vadimych.

“Yes, thank God, everything is all right.”

“Has anything happened?”

“Nothing that I know of.”

“Did the peasants come?”

"Yes, they did."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told them that the master had ordered me to chase them away."

"And what did they do?"

"Nothing. What can they do but scratch their heads if there's nowhere to pasture the cattle."

"What sort of talk is this? You look out, Kondraty. . . ."

Alexander Vadimych stared so angrily at Kondraty that he turned away, munched with his lips and said:

"It seems as though our young lady's ill."

"What's up with her?"

"She took ill, tossed about all night. . . . That's what."

Alexander Vadimych said, "Himm," and frowned. He did not believe that Volkovs could be sick and if his daughter had not slept all night it meant that maiden's dreams had her in their grip and marriage was the cure for this sickness. The thought of his daughter's marriage made Alexander Vadimych frown. Where could he find a suitable bridegroom? The devil alone knew! The prince, of course, was indicated, but how to get him to propose? He visited the house and, it was said, met Katya in the garden at night and still did not propose, the scoundrel. All this worried him to death and he thought it would be fine if he were to wake up one morning and Kondraty were to say, "The young lady's married, sir. . . ."

"Oh, hell, you all drive me crazy," said Alexander Vadimych at last, turned his head, coughed and spat. Then he held his legs out to Kondraty, buttoned up the bone button of his wide trousers and stood up.

"Order them to harness Klyauznitsa to the droshky," he said and went to his washstand.

The washstand was fitted with a porcelain jug swinging on two lugs and so arranged that if you touched the spout the water came pouring out all at once. Snorting, Alexander Vadimych washed himself and put on a sail-

cloth jacket he had worn so long that it had adopted the shape of his body to an extent that it even showed the nipples on his breasts; then he went into the dining-room.

As he sat over his coffee in the dining-room Alexander Vadimych remembered his daughter, frowned again and set off down the corridor to her room.

Katya was lying in bed, hollow-cheeked and pale. She sat up and kissed her father, her hand in his, and again lay back on the pillows; placing her two hands under her cheek she closed her eyes.

"Ugh, you sour-be'ly," said Alexander Vadimych, rubbing his nose hard with his forefinger. "Shall I send for a doctor?"

Katyenka did not open her eyes but slowly shook her head. Out of sheer stubbornness Alexander Vadimych immediately ordered Kondraty to drive into Kolyvan and bring the doctor, dead or alive. He patted his daughter on the cheek, went out on to the porch and stood with his arms akimbo admiring the grey filly harnessed to the droshky.

The filly Klyauznitsa rolled her bloodshot eyes, lay her ears flat and sat back on her haunches waiting till she was set free to play her pranks.

"She's a rogue," said the coachman merrily, holding Klyauznitsa by the bridle. "She chewed up the stableman's hand this morning."

"Such a wound wants sprinkling, Alexander Vadimych," said the stable-man, removing his cap.

"All right, go to the kitchen and get a drink," answered Alexander Vadimych; as he left the porch a pleasant tremor ran over him. Restraining himself he climbed on to the droshky seat, took the reins between his fingers, pressed his cap more firmly on his head and said in a soft voice:

"Let her go."

The coachman let go the bridle. Klyauznitsa did not

move, she merely snorted noisily, distending her pink nostrils.

"Gee up, darling," said Alexander Vadimych and flicked the reins. Klyauznitsa pawed the ground and reared. The coachman was going to take hold of the bridle again but Volkov shouted to him to leave it alone and slapped the filly with both reins.

Klyauznitsa leaped forward, squatted on her haunches and then reared. Volkov hit her again and she bucked, and up with her tail and let loose at him, and raced away. . . . The stable-man and the coachman ran after her. Klyauznitsa, however, was already on the road and Alexander Vadimych, vainly tugging at the reins, could do nothing but spit, puff and roll his eyes. The coachman and the stable-man ran as far as the village gate, slapped their thighs and roared with laughter: "That's something a bit stronger than you are used to. . . ."

Klyauznitsa galloped off the road across the grass that beat against her legs, kicked and whinnied and did everything she could to upset the droshky but Alexander Vadimych kept a firm seat, his moustaches blowing in the wind, and tried to guide the filly up a hill.

He managed to do it but Klyauznitsa, as soon as she reached the top of the hill behind which the estate was hidden, thought of a new trick: she dropped in the shafts while galloping at full speed.

Volkov had not expected this and when the horse fell he climbed down from the droshky to help her to get up again.

Klyauznitsa, however, jumped up immediately herself, knocked Volkov over and made off across the field, the droshky clattering behind her.

Alexander Vadimych was more than usually annoyed and would have run after Klyauznitsa but there and then the heat overcame him and he lay down to get his breath beside a stack of last year's hay.

At that very moment a wicker tarantass to which a pair of sorry nags were harnessed with ropes came trotting past on the road not far from the haystack.

The people in the tarantass had had an excellent view of Volkov's disgrace; they pulled up the horses and a familiar voice called out to him.

"Alexander Vadimych, are you hurt?"

Volkov looked up at the passers-by and swore to himself. Obratsov, his head hanging down, lay asleep in the tarantass, and Tsuryupa, in evening-dress and patent-leather dress shoes, was coming across the grass towards the hayrick.

"He saw it, the scoundrel," thought Volkov. "Now the whole district will know that the confounded filly got the better of me."

Tsuryupa came running up, pulled up his trousers at the knees and bent over Volkov.

"My God, you're in a swoon!"

Volkov immediately sat up.

"What do you want with me, anyway? I was driving along, got fed up with it and lay down in the shade to rest."

"But where is your horse, Alexander Vadimych?"

"She went off, the devil take her. That's the trouble! She stood quietly all the time, I suppose the flies worried her."

"The horse went towards the farm, we saw it from the hilltop," said Tsuryupa. "But that's nothing. I'm glad to have met you. I was coming to see you and tell you something very important."

He bent over Volkov's ear and whispered to him.

"I must warn you that Prince Krasnopol'sky, Alexei Petrovich, is a scoundrel, but that's strictly *entre nous*."

"What's the matter?" asked Alexander Vadimych, getting up on all fours and then standing at full height. He pulled down his coat and added, "More gossip?"

"I don't like gossip myself," Tsuruyupa continued hurriedly. "It is *mauvais ton*, but this is out of sheer friendship for you and then there is the matter of your honour. Yesterday, you see, we went to dinner with him, I, the Rtishchevs and Obraztsov—you may admire the state he's in still. The intemperance displayed at the prince's table is positively obscene. After dinner there was every possible kind of nonsense and then he proposed that we all go to Kolyvan to the girls. What sort of behaviour is that! . . . But I had to go with the company. We drove there. In Kolyvan they all drank beyond the bounds of decency and four naked girls were brought in."

"Naked?" asked Alexander Vadimych.

"That's just it. Horribly disgusting, but I thought I would let the prince go to whatever length he liked. And just imagine what he did!" Tsuruyupa paused for a moment and looked Volkov straight in the eyes so that the latter suddenly grunted and blinked. "Imagine it—at about midnight our dear prince ran out into the yard and shouted, 'Hi, horses, I want to go to Volkovo.'"

"To me?" asked Alexander Vadimych.

"But, of course, you understand. . . . This is a very delicate matter: of course he was coming to see you, Alexander Vadimych, but—how can I say it tactfully—people might think that it was not you he was coming to see."

For the sake of clarity Tsuruyupa spread out his fingers under Alexander Vadimych's nose who suddenly exploded when he realized what was being hinted at.

"Ugh, you blockhead!"

Tsuruyupa, however, had already gone so far that he did not take offence but continued in more rapid tones.

"And he actually did go to your place, and all of them, you know, started flinging indecent jokes about until I shouted that we had had enough of these foul scenes and that it was time to get away. We had left our horses at

Miloye, however, and so here we are riding on Zemstvo nags. I have long been saying that this princeling should not be received. And is he really a prince, perhaps he is a Jew?"

Alexander Vadimych was no longer listening to Tsuryupa. He was already warmed up by the humiliating incident with Klyauznitsa and by now was so wild that he could not utter a word, he only sniffed and opened his mouth which even scared Tsuryupa.

"And where is that scoundrel?" said Volkov at last. "Get me horses at once! I'll thrash him!"

"Excellent, excellent, we'll let these nags take us to my place and from there we'll go together to Miloye and pick up the Rtishchevs: let him answer for his doings," whispered Tsuryupa, and wriggling like a snake he ran towards the tarantass behind Volkov, pleased that he had had his revenge for that "lout."

II

Not until after lunch did the horsemen, warmed up by wine, leave Tsuryupa's house for Miloye.

Volkov, his elbows sticking out, rode in front on a shaggy Siberian pony that groaned under the weight of its rider. The Rtishchev brothers rode behind him cracking their whips and shouting:

"This is life! This is the way I like it! Shoot faster."

The Rtishchev brothers did not care on whose side they were: the prince's or Tsuryupa's—it was all the same to them as long as the wind whistled in their ears. Furthermore, Tsuryupa had persuaded them to punish immorality.

Tsuryupa, crumpled and lifeless, but dressed in a well-cut jacket, riding-breeches and gaiters, brought up the rear on an English mare.

With the sand flying from the horses' hoofs they gal-

loped on through the growth of willow bushes and the nearer they got to Miloye the higher Volkov raised one of his red eyebrows while the other drooped down over his eye and he thrust out his jaw, thinking all the time of new tortures that he would inflict on the prince.

Alexei Petrovich, having slept a troubled sleep for the remainder of the night, took a cooling bath, had himself rubbed down with a towel and sat down at the piano in a small round hall whose windows had coloured glass in the upper half.

The piano was made in the shape of a lyre, a rosewood instrument, battered and out of tune. The prince played with one hand a tune that he remembered by heart, the *Chanson triste*. The sun shining through the stained-glass panes flooded the parquet floor where the mosaic garlands and wreaths seemed to come to life. Dull, boring engravings hung against the blue stuff on the walls and opposite the piano there was a portrait of a bepowdered old man in a red waistcoat with a scroll in his hand. All this—the worn sofas, the round tables and the music-sheets with torn covers—obviously not in common use—was dilapidated and smelled of mildew. Alexei Petrovich swung round on the piano-stool.

“They looked through those stained-glass windows,” he thought, “listened to the strains of waltz tunes, lay on the sofas, loved and kissed surreptitiously—that’s all they did and then they died. And the house they lived their lives in, its furnishings and memories, were all handed down to me. Why? So that I should die, and rot away, like the rest of them!”

He again ran his fingers over the keys and sighed; the fatigue that had been chased away by his recent bath again overtook him and bowed his shoulders.

“Katya darling,” he muttered slowly.

With his eyes closed he imagined Katyenka as he had seen her the day before, her profile turned to the moon

and her sloping shoulder under the down shawl. If he could only press his face to her shoulder and find eternal peace!

“Can’t I live with Katya like a brother, loving and gentle? But would she want *such* a love? She already feels that she is a woman. That, of course, is something she *must* experience. Let her know happiness, momentary and acute. If I could only forget myself with her for a day, for a week! And then go away for ever. For the rest of my life there would remain with me a sweet sadness, a knowledge that I have held a precious treasure in my arms, have possessed happiness and myself renounced it. That has the greatest power of all. It will outweigh everything else. How sweet is the sadness that brings tears! How splendid it is! How she ran towards me yesterday and held out her hands. I should have smothered her with kisses. Oh, my God, my God! I told her the rottenest things. Why? She will not understand. She won’t accept it!”

Alexei Petrovich passed his hand over his face, got up from the piano, lay down at full length on a sofa that the sun had warmed up and put his hands under his head. Just then a footman knocked gently at the door and told him that lunch was ready.

“Go away,” said Alexei Petrovich. His train of thought, however, was broken, and he went angrily downstairs to the columned room where the table had been laid; he glanced at the stone-faced footman who stood respectfully waiting, frowned (yesterday’s wine still gave him a feeling of nausea) and folding his hands behind his back leaned against a cool pillar. Behind the tall firs visible through the French window, the huge sun was sinking. A wild dove cooed sadly and sweetly. The leaves of an ash-tree rustled, shivered on the twigs and came to rest. Everything here was ancient, centuries-old, and everything was being repeated anew.

"I shall change," thought Alexei Petrovich. "I shall love her all my life. I love her so much that it makes me cry. Darling, darling, darling. . . . Katya will curb me. Oh Lord, let me be true like everybody else. Take this restlessness from me, take away the poison from my thoughts. Let me sit beside her all my life. I will forget, forget everything. . . . If only to love. . . . There is something I hold sacred. There's Sasha—let her look after herself. Sasha can be tormented and abandoned! She is meek: she will burn out and then bless me with her dying breath."

Alexei Petrovich thrust a hand into his waistcoat as though he were trying to hold his heart back—it was beating faster and faster until it began to hurt him. He pressed closer to the column. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. "I need a bromide," thought Alexei Petrovich; he strode over to an armchair, sank into it helpless from a heart that was beating excessively fast.

At that very moment doors slammed in the house and he heard the sound of heavy footsteps. A scared footman came running to the heavy oaken doors, they flew open and Volkov, followed by the Rtishchevs and Tsuryupa, crashed into the room.

"Give him to me!" screamed Volkov, rolling his bulging eyes. He kicked the lunch table so that the platters rattled. "And he dares eat!" Then he walked over to the balcony doors and noticed the prince between the columns gripping the arms of the chair and looking up at him. "For such doings, brother," he muttered, sticking out his lower jaw, "you get a fist in your face!"

"That's right!" screamed the Rtishchevs.

Tsuryupa remained standing at the door repeating: "Gentlemen, gentlemen, be a little more judicious!"

The prince's face turned green. He thought that Katya had told her father everything. And now he that had been crushed already must suffer further insults. Again the

gleaming whip would whistle. Again he would have to lie down and bite the pillow. . . .

Under the prince's glance Volkov suddenly calmed down, as though he were ashamed of himself. It was the glance one sees in the eyes of an injured dog when the keeper comes to it with a rope to strangle it and put it out of its misery—its only defence is in its eyes. There are some people who cannot raise a hand to throw the noose, but turn away, walk off and throw stones from a distance.

So it was with Volkov: he stopped short, lowered his brows and muttered:

"What are you staring at? You can't act the way you do, brother, even if you do come from a good family. Don't forget that I'm a father. Carouse as much as you like but don't dare dishonour my daughter!"

As he said this he again began to puff and blow; he took a step forward and screamed:

"I'll beat you up, I can't contain myself!"

"What have I done?" asked Alexei Petrovich quietly, beginning to tremble imperceptibly from an acute pleasure—the worst was already over.

"What's that? You behave disgustingly with Sasha and then boast in front of everybody that you come to my house in the middle of the night. I didn't set eyes on you at all. You have disgraced me throughout the whole district."

Alexei Petrovich got up swiftly, unable to restrain a light laugh. He seized the astonished Volkov by the hands.

"Come along, my friend," and he led Volkov out on to the balcony and leaning towards his shoulder—it smelled of perspiration and horses—he said, "I love Katya, let her marry me. I've changed, old man. Now I've got over it all."

He choked. Volkov's head shook from excitement.

"Yes, yes, I understand. So you've made up your mind? That's quite a different matter. I, myself, wanted— Only you, brother, do everything in a hurry. You're a real rusher, brother." He wiped his forehead and ended up in a lowered voice: "I'll take a walk amongst the bushes in the garden for a bit. It's an important matter. Don't be afraid, I'll just try to come to. . . ."

Volkov, treading heavily, went down the balcony steps. The prince went back into the room, his dry fists clenched, and said between his teeth to Tsurypa and the Rti-sheveys:

"Get out of here!"

Volkov did not like hesitation and meditation when he wanted something really badly. After sitting for a while amongst the bushes, therefore, he went back to the prince and said that everything had to be settled that evening. He went to the stables himself, cursed the stable-men for a long time, for the eye of a good husbandman saw so many signs of their neglect. He looked into all the stalls and into the carriage-house and on his way back shouted to the prince, who was standing on the porch:

"Don't take offence, sir, but you don't know how to run an estate—fancy letting the stables get in that state! God help me, I'll soon put things in order for you."

The prince merely laughed softly. He could not restrain that laugh although he was afraid of it and felt that nothing good was in store for him. But when Volkov had selected the best carriage, had a trio of black horses harnessed to it and was driving Alexei Petrovich to his own place, the prince acted so strangely that when they were halfway there, Volkov glanced at his companion and said:

"What are you so upset about? Stop it, I tell you, pull yourself together—Katya won't refuse you."

When they reached Volkovo at sundown, however, an unexpected misfortune awaited them which accelerated

events and was to have a tremendous effect not only on the prince and Katyenka but also on Doctor Grigory Ivanovich Zobotkin who fluttered into the whole business like a fly into the flames.

III

On the morning of that day the gig was sent for Grigory Ivanovich.

He had thrown open the doors and windows of his log-cabin and was scrubbing out the fusty place with soap and hot water; everywhere he had laid down clean paper and some extremely uninteresting books he had found under the stove; now and then he stopped with a rag in his hand to look out of the window at the sun that was drying the floor and the benches so quickly.

"I love cleanliness," thought Grigory Ivanovich. "It makes your soul clean and joyous. And what a day! Geese in the water, clouds in the sky. Sheer joy!"

Father Vasily looked in for a moment and was so astonished that he asked in worried tones, "Are you quite well, Grisha?" From the first words he realized what had happened and afraid of disturbing this still unstable (as he thought) joy he smiled and went quietly away—Grigory Ivanovich did not even notice him go.

He had an idea that happiness must certainly come to him that day. And if it should not come? No, it simply had to.

A little later a gig drawn by two black horses drove up to the doctor's house. In his astonishment Grigory Ivanovich, a rag in his hand, stuck his head out of the window. The coachman jumped down from the gig, went over to the window and asked:

"Hi, tousel-head, is the doctor at home or has he gone away?" He looked into the cottage and squinted at Grigory Ivanovich. "Get a move on and call the doctor—"

our young lady's taken poorly. Tell him he's wanted at Volkovo, at Alexander Vadimych's."

Grigory Ivanovich immediately left the window and dropped his rag. His heart missed a beat and it was difficult for him to breathe. He recalled Yekaterina Alexandrovna as he had seen her, lifting her wet skirts, walking down the gangplank—he saw her gleaming head of hair, her rounded shoulders and her tall figure wrapped in silk. . . .

"And suppose it's typhus?" thought Grigory Ivanovich. "But no, it can't be."

"Hi, you!" he shouted, running back to the window. "I am the doctor, I'll come in a minute!"

He already had his cap in his hand when he glanced into the fragment of glass nailed up between the windows and had a distorted view of his broad red face with the down on the cheeks and the straw-coloured hair that hung down to his shoulders.

"How disgusting," muttered Grigory Ivanovich, stepping back. "It really is a touse-head. No, I can't go."

He sat down quickly on a bench, his forehead wrinkled, but he immediately jumped up again, seized a pair of scissors and jabbing the ends into his mass of hair began clipping away a lock at the side which fell to the floor without separating. Grigory Ivanovich put his foot on it; looking out of the corner of his eyes he cut away more and more hair, starting from both sides; he realized that the scissors would not go right round to the back and that, in general, he was going crazy.

Harness bells tinkled outside and the coachman deliberately yawned loudly; Grigory Ivanovich, sweating profusely, bending his knees and twisting his neck, cut the hair away from the back of his head. He threw down the scissors and went to the washstand but there was no water there. He did not know where his coat was. The coachman struck loudly with his whip on the shutters

and asked whether he would be long. Zobotkin stamped his foot—nothing like it had ever happened to him before—it was like a dream in which he wanted to run and his feet became rooted to the spot, and when he wanted to ward off something, his arms would not move.

“Drive there hell for leather,” said Grigory Ivanovich at last as he sprang into the gig. He continued tidying himself up the whole way, he wiped his face with a handkerchief and was in complete despair. When the ponds, garden and red roofs of Volkovo came in sight he felt like jumping out. Everything that was happening to him that day was like a dream.

Kondraty met the doctor on the porch and led him into the house. Grigory Ivanovich, breathing in the faintly decaying odour of those old rooms, immediately began to walk on tiptoe, realizing that here he had to talk daintily and make elegant gestures—for here Yekaterina Alexandrovna had walked at least once on every one of the floor boards, she had stood by every window; this was not an ordinary house, it was a miracle.

“This way,” said Kondraty, stopping in front of a carpet that covered a door. “And listen,” he swallowed hard, “don’t you give her too many of your powders.”

He pulled back the *portière* and Grigory Ivanovich, muttering, “Wait a bit, wait a bit, oh, all right,” pulled his coat straight, passed his hand over his face and went in. His eyes roamed round the room and immediately came to rest on the pillows where the girl’s head lay, its back to the door. Two plaits, divided by a parting, lay around her neck, an arm naked to the elbow lay on the blue quilt.

Grigory Ivanovich squinted, glanced at the red slippers lying on the carpet and the idea flashed through his mind that he, Doctor Zobotkin, was a charlatan, a bunch of dirty rags. But he immediately forgot all that.

Katya sighed and turned slowly over on to her back. Grigory Ivanovich stepped back in his fright. She blinked rapidly, then she woke up completely and her eyes turned in astonishment on the man who had entered the room. Then she lowered her eyes and blushed.

"Oh, it's you, doctor," she said. "Good-morning. Excuse us for bothering you. But Father—"

Grigory Ivanovich forced himself to approach her bedside; Katya stretched out a hand that was still warm from sleep and he, blushing a deep red, pressed her hand, pulled himself together, got out his watch but could not see the hands, began beating out the seconds with his foot, lost count of them, lost his own self-possession, let go of Katya's hand and dropped his watch. Katya slowly covered her face with her hands, her shoulders trembled and she burst out laughing, unable to contain herself.

Doctor Zabolkin went as cold as if he were in a heavy frost, he even felt nauseated, his lips twisted into a foolish smile—curse it! At last Katya, her eyes filled with the tears of laughter, spoke to him.

"Don't be angry with me, dear doctor, but for God's sake tell me what has happened to your hair?" And she laughed loudly and merrily.

In desperation he looked into the mirror, saw his wry face, the bald patches on his head, ridges where he had clipped it and a queue left behind. . . .

"That was done in the dark," he muttered. "I've always been in the habit—" and losing his self-control he stumbled out of the room.

IV

Kondraty was waiting at the door in the passage.

"Listen," Grigory Ivanovich shouted desperately to Kondraty. "Run and order horses, I'm going away this very minute, I can't stand it any longer."

"Please don't be so stubborn," answered Kondraty sternly. "You're not at home now, please follow me."

Grigory Ivanovich said, "Aha," and obediently followed Kondraty down the passage to a little room under the staircase where he sat down on a trunk covered with felt.

"My name is Kondraty Ivanovich and not 'listen,'" said Kondraty after a short pause, leaning against the door frame, "and that's that. And what are you here for, to worry our young lady to death? Did you clip your hair like that deliberately, out of sheer ignorance?"

"Kondraty Ivanovich," shouted the doctor, "shut up! I understand quite well myself!"

"You ought to listen and not try to make matters worse, Mr. Doctor. In any case I shan't give you horses. I held Katyenka in my arms when she was a baby and as long as I'm alive I'll not let anybody try experiments on her. She needs curing with kind words and not with powders—her illness is that of a young woman. D'you understand? All right. You made her laugh by looking so ridiculous—that's good. I was young myself once and liked a good joke. When the master swaggers about the house in good health everything goes the right way and the servants do what is required of them. Let me tidy you up. To go to her a second time looking like that would be rude and no joke."

Kondraty took up a pair of scissors and Grigory Ivanovich, obediently offering his head, asked him:

"Kondraty Ivanovich, did you really carry the young lady in your arms?"

"Yes, in my arms," answered Kondraty and suddenly lowered the scissors and listened: somebody was walking along the passage trying the handles of the doors and then either coughed or was trying to stifle a sob.

"Seems like a stranger," said Kondraty, "doesn't it?"

The noise died down and the old servant went out with a troubled air.

Soon the sound of his voice came to the doctor: "You mustn't, you mustn't, go away," and then another voice, a woman's, speaking swiftly and pleading. Grigory Ivanovich did not care. He washed himself, smoothed down his hair, cleaned his frock-coat and thought: "Of course I am not handsome, even a bit clumsy, in fact, but there is a certain youthfulness in my face and there is expression in my eyes"; he sighed restrainedly and went out into the garden to wait until they sent for him to see his patient.

Once in the garden he turned round the corner of the house, walked across the grass and sat on an iron seat, placing his hands on a green watering can that was standing near by.

Bees buzzed around his feet over the grass, there was a smell of clover in the air; this and the warm, low sun that shone through the leaves of the trees on to the stuccoed walls of the house and Katyenka's window with the drawn curtain (he guessed it was her window by the curtain) excited him like music and Grigory Ivanovich, closing his eyes and exposing the back of his head to the sun, felt that his whole body was growing weaker, he seemed to merge with the light and the silence and everything—the sky, the clouds in the sky, the water, trees and the field—all merged into him. Or perhaps he himself was diffusing—giving his eyes to the sky, his soul to the clouds, his blood to the water, his hands to the trees and his body to the earth? It was just like death, a dream, or love. "Never mind if I spend my whole life wandering around stinking cottages," he thought, "never mind if I am ugly and unable to die for her, but no, I can die if she would only order me to. What do I want? Nothing! I only want to live, feel, breathe. . . ."

At this moment Prince Alexei Petrovich appeared on the balcony between columns that in places had lost

their stucco so that the bricks showed through. He was dressed in a black frock-coat and striped trousers; he leaned on a stick held in his right hand and with his left hand, in which he held his gloves, he brushed away a bee with a gesture of fear. The bee flew away. The prince hurried down into the garden, did not notice Zobotkin and with unusual excitement stood up on tiptoe to look at the window with the drawn curtains.

"It's impossible," he muttered out aloud. "That would be too much!" He slashed out with his stick, turned round and seeing Grigory Ivanovich, thrust out his lower lip.

"And who's that?" thought the doctor looking at the prince.

"Are you the doctor?" asked Alexei Petrovich. "Who is with Yekaterina Alexandrovna at the moment? Do you know anything?"

"But what's happened? Something wrong?"

"No, but I don't know anything," Alexei Petrovich sat down on the seat, touched Grigory Ivanovich's hand and began to speak very tenderly. "One does not hide anything from priests and doctors, does one? Tell me, perhaps there is some medicine for the heart that would stop it from hurting so, something that would enable me to keep it in control?"

"Bromide," answered Grigory Ivanovich.

"Yes, but that's not what I mean. When the prison gates are opening before a convict and he stands on the threshold and sees the sun and then somebody says to him, 'We have recalled your old sins, go back.' 'But I have reformed.' 'No, go back.' Doctor, Yekaterina Alexandrovna's husband should be pure and free, shouldn't he?"

"Are you going to marry?" asked Grigory Ivanovich looking intently at the prince's too red lips and his

troubled eyes. "What white hands," he thought and suddenly felt extremely sad.

The prince continued.

"I am no enemy to myself, let her, too, believe that I am no enemy. I am tormented more than she is. I did not go to Kolyvan for pleasure. By the way, you don't know anything about it. . . . I came to ask for her hand, and—Doctor, if something bad happens, will you help me? I know that a denunciation is being made about me behind those curtains."

He stopped for breath, sighed, looked the doctor straight in the eyes and smiled piteously.

"Yekaterina Alexandrovna is worthy of anybody's suffering," said Grigory Ivanovich although he did not know why he said it; in his confusion he began tipping over the watering can until the water poured out of the spout.

Just then a scream came from Katyanka's window and was drowned by a deep bass voice, somebody ran to the open window, the curtains shook and a woman's bare head dropped on to the window-sill from inside the room. A pair of bare arms struggled trying to tear somebody's hairy fingers away from her throat.

Then came another woman's despairing shriek that made Zobotkin turn cold and the prince, strangely pale, jumped up from the seat repeating in a tormented voice, "Don't touch her, don't touch her, don't touch her. . . ." The hairy fingers let go of her throat and the woman's head slipped down from the window-sill. Grigory Ivanovich wanted to get up but the prince fell forward on to his knees, grasping him with weakening fingers, his head hanging loose.

"It's nothing, lean back, that's better, it will soon pass," muttered Grigory Ivanovich, wetting the prince's forehead with water from the can.

THE WHIRLPOOL

I

Grigory Ivanovich, supporting the prince, led him across the balcony into the drawing-room looking for a place for him to lie down quietly. The right-hand door of the drawing-room led into the library. "There," said the prince, pressing his hand. The sound of voices, cries and stamping feet came from somewhere in the house.

The prince and Zobotkin had scarcely entered the library before the door leading from the passage was thrown open and in the half light the stable-man and coachman could be seen leading Sasha by the arms. Her black sarafan was torn, her hair was tousled and her tearful face with her raised eyebrows was thrown back. Sasha kept repeating softly and despairingly:

"What are you doing? What are you doing?"

Kondraty pushed her along from behind. Volkov, banging the door with his fist, cursed and shouted:

"Lock her up in the barn, the hussy!" He did not see the prince and Zobotkin who had already gone into the library.

Sasha was taken away. Volkov slammed the balcony door and went cursing into the house.

Grigory Ivanovich and the prince sat for a long time in silence on the sofa beside a bookcase—the doctor's knees were trembling and the prince sat immobile, the back of his head leaning against the sofa and his eyes closed.

"What are they doing that to her for?" whispered the doctor at last looking at the prince—his face, scarcely visible in the twilight, was very handsome. "That's how one should love," thought Grigory Ivanovich, "beautifully and with great strength; one should faint and feel unusual passions! He'll make a real husband for

Yekaterina Alexandrovna. Books are written about people like that." He stretched his hand out warily and stroked the prince's.

"Doctor, will you stay with me?" asked Alexei Petrovich in a low voice.

Grigory Ivanovich nodded his head.

"Have they taken her away?" asked the prince. "That's terrible. Life is not so simple, my dear doctor. Poor Sasha!"

Alexei Petrovich suddenly sat up as though he had thrown off a mask.

"I know what is noble and what is honest but still I act ignobly and dishonestly, and the baser the act the better I like it. It's enough to drive me mad. And what could be better than to see yourself as others see you: a scoundrel sits in a carriage in a grey hat and gloves, and nobody strikes him across the eyes, everybody respects him and he is pleased with himself. You choke when you realize it to the full. And isn't it strange—I go home from here at night, after leaving Yekaterina Alexandrovna and I look up at the sky and the moon (there must be a moon) and I laugh quietly in my happiness, so softly the coachman can't hear me. And immediately, when I look at myself impersonally I see that it would be monstrous to do something rotten. My hands still smell of her perfume. And when I, overcome by my own feelings, stop the horses in Sasha's yard, go into the house, take her by the hands and lay my head on her breast and deceive her, 'Sasha, darling, comfort me, s!' comforts me in the way she knows. And after she has comforted me I tell her why I have come—that's the rottenest thing of all. Again I lie to her and her heart breaks. And so she gets more and more wound up until the spring breaks, like it did just now."

"But listen, this is all so monstrous, you must have gone out of your mind," whispered Grigory Ivanovich.

moving away from him. He did not understand everything but felt that the prince, twisting and writhing like a snake, was laying bare his soul. Grigory Ivanovich was confused and disgusted. He began pulling at his beard, stood up and walked about the room.

"Yes, it's monstrous," continued the prince and his voice was as even-toned as though he were watching himself. "But what is still worse is that I have now lied to you too. It is very difficult to tell the real truth: you twist around somewhere near it, you're just about to say it and when you look you can't see the truth any more, you have run away from it along a winding road. It's like keeping a diary. Have you ever tried? Then don't. I have presented myself to you almost as one tormented by the greatest troubles. What sort of troubles do I bear? I'm simply a man with a defect, with a crack—like this leg: the bullet went in here; I seem to be able to straighten the leg right out and then it begins playing tricks on me, look, it's twisted away to the side again. The main thing is not to expose my real nature. Yes, yes, I need to drink much too much before I can let you see me as I really am. My dear doctor, believe me, I love Yekaterina Alexandrovna more than my life and if she refuses me now I am lost. That's the truth. I learned it yesterday: yesterday was the final test and I did not pass it—although, of course, there wasn't really any test, just plain debauchery—in the night I drove here and purified myself in Yekaterina Alexandrovna's beauty, in the moonlight and in my confession. The dear girl, I threw a burden on to her that was too heavy for my own shoulders. This morning I sent the coachman to Sasha with orders to tell her: 'Don't dare think about the master any more, the master's going to get married.' Sasha could not stand it and came running here on foot. . . . I knew that she would tell them."

"It's all lies!" suddenly exclaimed Grigory Ivanovich;

he wanted to add something but stuttered and again began running up and down the room, pulling at his beard.

"Doctor," pleaded the prince in a scarcely audible voice, "go to Yekaterina Alexandrovna and tell her everything, she will understand."

"I shan't go and I shan't tell her anything!" shouted Grigory Ivanovich. "Explain it yourself. I don't understand anything and I can't stand lunatics."

He pressed his hot forehead against the glass. It was quite dark and beyond the trees, the moon, which still gave no light, was rising like a huge, almost round, orange mirror that reflected the whole sad world.

"What shall I tell her?" thought Grigory Ivanovich. "That he's an egoist and a madman? But then he loves her. I don't know. . . . I don't understand such love. I would look at her and cry. I wouldn't even say anything to her. . . . Can you tell a cloud how you love it?"

While Grigory Ivanovich was wrapt in meditation the moon began to shine more brightly, its cold light touched the dew on the leaves and cast long shadows. A light haze curled over the grass. Through the library windows the moonlight lit up a half of Alexei Petrovich's face and his hand, the thumb of which was thrust into his waistcoat. The bronze corners of the bookcase shone in the moonlight.

Suddenly Grigory Ivanovich shuddered: Yekaterina Alexandrovna walked swiftly past the window (he recognized her by the lines of her shoulders and her proudly held head), looked round when she reached the turn in the avenue and then ran—her white shawl streamed out behind her.

"She has run into the garden," said the doctor quickly, turning round.

The prince jumped up and opened the French window.

"Come on, hurry up," he whispered.

They ran out into the garden.

II

A wooden barn stood alone in a field between the ditch that marked the boundary of the garden and the straw-stacks. Sledges and harrows were piled up under its eaves. The door, which had a small square hole cut in the bottom for cats to go in and out, was fastened by a heavy padlock.

Sighs and soft weeping could be heard behind the door.

Yekaterina Alexandrovna ran across the field from the ditch to the barn and stopped, panting, at the door; she dropped on to her knees and lowering her head to the cat-hole called out:

"Sasha, are you here? Are you crying?"

The weeping behind the door ceased and Katyenka felt Sasha's breath on her face, she could even distinguish her eyes.

"I would let you out," she said, "but I haven't got the key."

Sasha sighed. Katyenka put her hand through the hole and stroked Sasha's cheek.

"I'll ask Kondraty and he'll take the key away from Papa without his knowing and we'll let you out, only a bit later. Sasha, tell me something. Put your cheek down lower and I'll kiss you. Darling, is it very painful to you? I'll make him come back to you. You didn't understand, he was joking with you. He said a lot of nonsense about me. He didn't come here to see me only, he came to Papa as well. You did blunder so, why did you say everything in front of Papa? Sashenka, nothing bad has happened. Think it over quietly. He'll come back to you tomorrow."

Sasha, however, began weeping more than ever and beating her head against the door. Katya pressed her hands to her temples and looked round to see if there was anything she could do to pacify her.

"There is nobody more unfortunate than me, dear young lady," said Sasha. "I would go through torture for him—and I know everything, I know that he was lying to me and laughing at me and he was flattered when he saw that I was tormented. And then I could not stand it any longer. . . . And then the stable-man came and said, 'The master orders you to forget all about him. Yes,' he said, 'and he orders you to go to bed with me.' And he was laughing all the time. I was stupefied. My foolish wits were all muddled and I ran out of the gate wondering whether I should fly to him or jump into the river. And there was my cousin going by in a cart and she shouted out, 'Can't wait for your prince to come, eh? Come down the road a bit and shout for him.' I didn't know I could get so awfully mad. Then I thought that I would let you know, young lady, what sort of fellow he is, that man of ours. . . ."

Yekaterina Alexandrovna got up from her knees with a swift movement and then sat down on the threshold, facing the pond. The dark figures of horses stood out on the bank. The lonely moon already floated high up in the sky extinguishing all the stars around.

Her chin resting in her hands Katyenka sat thinking and swallowing her tears. "How silly it all is! I have been well punished and I must forget him, forget." It seemed to her that the light of the moon was fluffy and unclear in the blue waste.

"Young lady," called Sasha, "dearest, be patient with him, love him, you're a woman yourself. If I had my way I wouldn't let you have him. It is hard on me. My summer is over, now it is your turn to suffer. . . ."

Katya did not listen to the end but stood up and looked at the door; she wanted to answer but thought better of it and walked away from the door. As she turned the corner of the barn she cried out softly and stood still.

The prince was sitting on harrows that had been folded up with the teeth down.

"What time can it be?" asked Katyenka looking across the field where in the distance the doctor was making desperate signals to the prince. "I expect Papa is waiting with supper."

The prince stirred. She turned round quickly and went to the house.

III

Apart from everything else Volkov was extraordinarily stubborn. The prince's proposal had unexpectedly settled all his troubles, and was furthermore flattering to Alexander Vadimych; the Krasnopolskys traced their name back to Rurik and had once ruled a principality. Thinking about Rurik (on the way back from Miloye) Alexander Vadimych had felt injured; he imagined that the prince might think too high of himself and immediately began pressing him with his shoulder into the corner of the carriage so that it hurt him. Alexei Petrovich, however, did not understand such finesse, and Volkov could not keep up his anger for a long time and, in order not to think any more about humiliation, decided that he would provide his daughter with an unheard-of dowry and had already begun to talk about it when that idiotic woman started all the fuss the moment they arrived at Volkovo. Everything had gone to the devil.

After venting his first burst of rage on Sasha, Alexander Vadimych realized that by storming around he was not getting anything done; the situation however was really unbearable and, thoroughly depressed, he went into his study and sat down at the table.

"I'll burst but I'll marry her to that scoundrel," thought Alexander Vadimych; he cursed the prince violently and then grew angry with his daughter, too.

Long meditation brought Alexander Vadimych to the

astounding idea that it was all nonsense and that no tragedy had occurred between Katyenka and the prince—what did it matter if he was a bit wild, that's what the world was divided into two parts for and without it life would bore one to death.

Then he struck his fist on the table and exclaimed, "I'll make peace between them!" In order to get himself into a fit state of mind he deliberately began to think about things that were more or less pleasant.

With this idea in mind he took a pencil, a sheet of paper that was fly-bespattered and started drawing a hare.

"Ugh, he's scuttling off, bandy-legs," muttered Volkov. "And d'you want me to send a fox flying after you?" He drew a fox behind the hare. "You want that hare, do you?" continued Alexander Vadimych. "Ugh, you hussy, and are you afraid of a wolf? Here he is, the big-head, running with his tail stuck out. He'll eat the pair of you, little dears. And I'll send the dogs after you, big hairy dogs with spots, to tear you up. Sock him, my beauties, sock him, darlings, don't let him go. Tally-ho!"

Volkov got so excited when he had drawn the dogs that he lifted himself from the chair and struck out fiercely at it, as though it were a horse he was riding. Then he put the pencil down, laughed and, satisfied with himself, went out of the room; on the way he ordered the footman to call everybody to supper.

The cook's two sons set out to round up the guests for supper. Volkov went to his daughter's room. Katya, fully dressed, was sitting on her bed.

"Come on, daughter, we've had a lot of excitement, come and get your supper," he said; when Katya was about to refuse he snorted so forcefully that she immediately answered:

"All right, Papa, I'll come."

The cook's boys found the guests in the field where the prince and the doctor were walking to and fro from the

barn to the ditch. The prince hurried back to the house immediately he was called but Grigory Ivanovich started telling the boys that he didn't want to eat and asked them to get him horses. Then he trotted after the prince.

In the small dining-room Alexander Vadimych greeted his guests with the words:

"Gentlemen, I presume that whatever may have happened here the stomach still holds its own. Take your places, please."

Pointing to the round table he sat down himself first and tucked a napkin round his neck.

It was at this moment that Yekaterina Alexandrovna came in, very pale and with shadows under her eyes. Without looking at anybody she sat down swiftly opposite her father. Her face was calm and proud, but there was a scarcely noticeable trembling of the vein on her bare neck.

"Ah, here's our invalid!" exclaimed Alexander Vadimych. "Katyanka, you haven't greeted the prince."

"I have," answered Katya, sharply.

Alexei Petrovich sat up in his chair looking as though he could not get enough air. Grigory Ivanovich lowered his head and scratched the table-cloth with his fork.

Alexander Vadimych, however, was not to be put off so easily. He seized hold of his moustaches, leaned on the table and looked round at the company with merry, twinkling eyes. The silence, however, continued. Kondraty, moving noiselessly, passed round the plates and filled the glasses with wine. The doctor, whose palms were wet with perspiration, was the first to look up at the host—in Alexander Vadimych's eyes there were flashes of irrepressible laughter.

"What's this nonsense?" he shouted, slapping his hand on the table. "All of you sitting here sulking. As if it mattered! Katya, don't pout! And seeing that there's a doctor here I'll tell you what I want, a grandson. Ugh.

you rogues, you don't like that, do you? Everything has been arranged. And that's all there is to it!"

In order to get things really going he burst into roars of laughter, so infectious that it seemed as if everybody, even Kondraty, would have to hold their sides. Alexander Vadimych, however, saw through the slits of his half-closed eyes that the laughter had not been a success. The prince's face showed a strained smile, Grigory Ivanovich was about to take a bite of chicken leg, but stopped with his hand in the air, his forehead furrowed by wrinkles of torment. Katyenka raised her eyes to her father and they were dark with wrath and misery.

"Papa, stop it or I'll go out," she said, hardly able to retain herself. Her cheeks were flushed a deep red. She stood up.

"Stop! Don't you dare leave!" shouted Volkov, angry by this time. "I make this announcement: here is the bridegroom and here is the bride. Go to her, prince, fall at her feet and ask her forgiveness."

The prince, terribly pale, slowly put down his napkin and stood up. Shrugging his shoulders self-consciously, his knees trembling, the prince went to her and spoke in a repugnant voice:

"I hope, my dear, that you will forgive me my past," and he seized her hand and pressed it.

Slowly, as though in a dream, Katya turned a greenish pale, pulled her hand away and struck the prince heavily across the face.

IV

And so the supper that Volkov had so cunningly planned came to a sudden end. The prince stood still, his head bowed, his face towards the doors through which Katya had disappeared so swiftly. Grigory Ivanovich covered his face with his hands. Volkov himself, holding knife and fork, was furious and his eyes were rolling.

Suddenly Kondraty came in. His mouth was pressed determinedly tight, his eyes flashing; with his thumb he pointed over his shoulder and said:

"The stable-boy reported that that woman, the one who was just here, has run away from the barn and he's worried about her dawdling near the water."

"To hell with the woman!" screamed Alexander Vadi-mych in a voice that was not his own. "Go to hell with that woman! Understand that?"

Kondraty, shaking his head, disappeared. Volkov tore the napkin from his neck, paused to think, ripped up the napkin and then went down the passage swiftly after his daughter.

The prince sat down at the table, poured himself some wine, rested his reddened cheek on his hand and smiled wryly.

"This doesn't really matter," he said.

Grigory Ivanovich immediately left the table, trembling so that his teeth chattered. Far away he could hear Volkov stamping to the far end of the corridor and from there came dull sounds of his voice.

"Funny expression, isn't it, 'dawdling near the water'?" said the prince.

He smiled, shrugged his shoulders and walked on tip-toe to the door; for an instant he leaned weakly against the door frame and then went out.

"They will all perish today," thought Grigory Ivanovich. "What are they doing? It's all that prince. He's like an infection. Why shouldn't they drive him away? I should drive him out and say: don't worry, Yekaterina Alexandrovna, I love you like—like what? I'm just a fool. I'll walk home from here this instant. I can't understand what's going on here. What sort of love do they want? They want torment, not love, that's it. But I can live without it, I've enough of my own, enough to last my whole life. She will poison herself right now, she's

sure to poison herself, and I'm worrying about my own cares. What was I so pleased about? If I was, then I'm the worst scoundrel on earth. Everybody thinks only of himself, the prince and Volkov and I, and that's how we've managed to torture her. My poor, unfortunate girl!"

Grigory Ivanovich was so mixed up in his distress that he did not know whether to go away or wait. In order not to hear those terrible voices at the end of the passage he went out into the garden and stood under the dark shrubs trying to recall what other trouble there had been and he walked across the pasture-land to the barn.

"And Sasha has been dragged into this whirlpool," he thought looking at the open door of the barn. "The way the water whirls in a funnel, it sucks everything into it."

Suddenly he realized what the prince's words had meant: "funny expression 'dawdling near the water.'" Sasha had thrown herself into the pond. . . . Of course. . . . She had run out of the barn door straight across the field and into the pond!

Grigory Ivanovich gasped and ran, swinging his arms. On the edge of the pond, where the water was dark from the shadows of the willows, Kondraty and the stable-man were standing. At their feet Sasha lay flat on the grass. The stable-boy, sitting on his heels, was looking at her motionless white face with the open mouth.

"It's all right," said the stable-man to Grigory Ivanovich as he ran up. "When I pulled her out she was still breathing, she's getting her breath back."

"She'll get her breath, she's fainted," said Kondraty.

Grigory Ivanovich sat down beside Sasha, opened her black blouse, tearing off the buttons, and placed his ear under her firm, high breast—she was still warm. Then he began to work her arms, press her stomach and raise and lower her heavy body. The stable-man helped him, chatting all the time.

"We saw a woman running. 'It must be her,' I said to myself and I shouted, 'Sasha, hi, Sasha!' She didn't answer but came straight on, she shook as though she were ill. I asked her if the master had let her out. She said he had. And she looked at the water. 'Where are you going, Sasha?' I asked. 'Good-bye,' she said and suddenly began crying bitterly and ran towards the dam. I laughed, she was weeping so hard. She went on to the dam and then asked, 'Stable-man, are you there?...' 'Go on,' I said, 'get across the dam,' and I was scared myself. Suddenly she went ... flop! ... into the water...."

"It wasn't you she called from the dam," said the stable-boy.

"You shut up," snapped the stable-man and flicked the boy with his fingers on the back of his cropped head "Cheeky kid!"

Grigory Ivanovich, bending down to Sasha's mouth, tried to blow air into her and with his hands pressed back her shoulders to expand her chest. Suddenly her cold lips trembled and Grigory Ivanovich turned sharply away as though from an unexpected kiss. Sasha stirred. They lifted her and sat her up. Water poured out of her open mouth. Sasha rolled the whites of her eyes and groaned.

"Take her to the gardener," said Kondraty. "Oh you women, all fools...."

V

At the end of the white passage Katya stood with the back of her head against the carpet at her door, her lips pressed stubbornly together, listening to her father's words; the latter was trying to seize her hand but she kept her hands behind her back. The prince stood some distance off under a hanging lamp.

"I'll make you apologize," reiterated Volkov, stuttering in his anger. "Where did you get that habit from—slap-

ping people's faces? Who taught you that? Give me your hand, give it here. Apologize, I tell you!"

Katyenka, however, pressed still closer to the brightly coloured carpet, her plait of hair had come undone and lay on her shoulder, her round knee pulled tight the grey silk of her dress that was drawn in at the waist under a high bosom.

The prince took note of her every movement and looking at her knee he felt a familiar pain in his breast. The sensation was clear and acute. The accidentally bent knee seemed to tear aside all veils and he saw Katyenka as a wife, a woman, a lover. He bit his dry lips and moved along the wall.

"Are you joking, or am I asleep?" continued Alexander Vadimych, who had never before had so many unpleasant things happen to him at once. For a moment he wondered whether it was all a bad dream, but he immediately began stamping his feet and shouting, "Answer, you block of stone!" But his daughter did not say a word and he again said, absolutely at his wits' end, "Ask his pardon, come on, ask his pardon!"

"No, I'd rather die!" said Katyenka brusquely. She looked at the slowly approaching prince and drew her brows together. She did not realize what he was looking at, why he was coming closer to her, she even stretched her neck to look at him and suddenly realizing what was happening, blushed deeply and raised her hand.

Alexander Vadimych stretched out to seize his daughter's hand, did not catch it and grunted angrily, while the prince, approaching close to her, spoke in a dull voice:

"Yekaterina Alexandrovna, once more I ask you, with deeper respect, for your hand. Please don't refuse me."

His eyes were dry, unblinking, terrible, his face was strained.

"There, you see, Katyenka," exclaimed Volkov. "Oh you children, drop it and kiss one another!"

But Katyenka did not answer, she only bowed her head and when her father was about to push the prince towards her she slipped quickly behind the carpet, slammed the door and turned the key.

"D'you see that?" shouted Volkov. "No, that won't do!"

He tried his shoulder against the door but it would not budge, then he began hammering on it with his fists and at last turned round and kicked it with his heel.

"Never mind, leave her, let's go," whispered the prince in unwonted excitement. "I know what she'll answer, for God's sake, let's go."

It took him a long time to persuade the stubborn Volkov. At last the latter wiped the perspiration from his face and said:

"You see, brother, it's no easy job marrying off your daughters—makes you sweat. Only you please keep quiet, don't make a fuss. I'll fix things myself."

When the hammering at the door had ceased and the footsteps died away in the passage, Katyenka threw herself face down on the bed and seized the pillow in both hands.

"That's what he needed, it'll do him good," she repeated, seeing (as though the pillow were transparent) Alexei Petrovich's eyes, dry and terrible. She feared to understand what she had read in them; Katyenka repeated her angry words but they had lost their strength and their meaning as though all her anger had gone into that disgraceful slap, as though with that one blow she had linked herself up with the prince more closely than love ever could.

"Oh Lord, make it so that today has never been," she repeated, unable to get her breath and seeing no way out. Her hatred, anger, jealousy, all her proud will, had been shattered like glass by that one slap—he would take her now as *his own* and if he wanted to he would abandon her: he could do as he would.

The memory of how he came towards her, buttoning his coat, "I hope, my dear . . ." burned her like fire. "Of course, that's all pretence—he suffered when he told me that story in the summer-house. Perhaps he was lying? He didn't say anything about Sasha. Found somebody to love! That's not love, of course, it's disgusting, unbearable debauchery! And then it wasn't for nothing that Father almost strangled Sasha." The recent scream resounded in Katyenka's ears. She sat up quickly on the bed. "And who is he to make people suffer so much? Why does he lie? Whom does he want? What does he want with the other one and Sasha and me? Whom does he love? What does he want me for? I suppose he needs me for something. Is he of another world? Has he never loved me? What can I do? I know, I know, he'll insist that I marry him, I know. And I shall, I shall and I'll have my revenge, to spite everyone I'll marry him. Don't let him dare compare me with the others. I'll accept the torture deliberately. I haven't been able to love and don't want to. I don't want any love."

Katyenka lowered her white-stockinged legs over the edge of the bed, rested her cheeks in her hands and tears dropped on to her dress and on to her knees. With fresh keenness she felt that there was no life for her now, no way out; she suppressed a scream and the tears came still faster.

At last her long period of crying eased her. Still sighing and with trembling shoulders she slowly removed her crumpled dress and went over to the mirror. In the tall mirror, lit from both sides, she saw her face and it looked quite different. "You're quite a beauty, my poor, dear Katyusha," she whispered in despair and studied her face closely. Then, until long after midnight she sat at the mirror thinking of herself, sadly and silently, as though that day had brought the end of her joy in life.

FATE

I

The prince remained at Volkovo. He had been given the best suite of rooms and everything needed for his comfort had been brought from Miloye. Alexei Petrovich did not go anywhere out of that suite of rooms. In the mornings, carefully shaved and dressed, he lay down on the sofa and in this manner spent his whole time, looking at his finger-nails and thinking. Whenever Alexander Vadimych stuck his head in the door to report on the state of the negotiations with his daughter, the prince would pretend to be dozing.

Alexei Petrovich realized to the full that only here, close to Katya, could he find his last salvation. He also realized that with every day of his stay at Volkovo the chances of Katya's consent increased: the whole district was already talking about the slap in the face and about Sasha, with the addition of such details that made the ladies flee from the room. As far as Alexander Vadimych was concerned such a state of affairs seemed the most suitable. In the morning he would go to his daughter's room and sit in the armchair at her window.

"What a stink of face-powder is here," he would say. "Making yourself look pretty?" And in answer to her look of indifference he would snort and continue, "I don't know what you girls want, you want an angel, do you? Take your late mother—she was a very well-bred woman with an English upbringing, but I went after her and she married me, although she cried a lot about it. That's how matters stand, daughter, you'll cry and you'll be a princess."

He would leave his daughter and go to Alexei Petrovich and if the latter was not pretending to be asleep

would sit on the sofa at his feet, tap him on the knee and say:

"She's giving way. A devil of a girl. And you just had to get mixed up in such a dirty business! If you made a mistake, you should not have talked about it. One thing I don't understand, why didn't you propose before this? I could have had you married already, and you could have gone abroad."

"I really don't know why I didn't propose before," answered the prince and, after Volkov had left, laughed to himself.

The first meeting between the betrothed took place on a garden seat. Volkov brought the prince first and then Katya, and exclaiming, "Good Lord, the calves are in the raspberry bushes," he ran away.

For a long time the prince and Katya sat in silence. Katya fidgeted with the edge of her shawl, the prince smoked. At last he threw his cigarette away, and turning from her, said:

"If you had wanted to marry me willingly, had loved me, I would not have married you."

Katyenka went terribly pale and her fingers got entangled in the fringe of the shawl. But still she did not speak.

"Let's put an end to this, let's get married," he said, softly and sadly.

Katya's cheeks burned with shame and anger and she turned sharply to him.

"I hate you!" she cried. "You torture me! You are deliberately ruining me! Couldn't you find anybody else in this world?"

"Katya, you're very clever, you must understand it all," he interrupted her hurriedly. "Shall we get married next week?"

"Yes," she answered in a scarcely audible voice, got up, stood still for a moment, and then went away without turning round.

II

The use of the so-called "corpse-reviver" is of very ancient origin. The "corpse-reviver" is prepared from grated cabbage, horse-radish, grated radish and the brine of pickled cucumbers; it is eaten after banquets.

There was, however, no "corpse-reviver" that could have dispelled the fumes of the Volkov wedding at which almost the entire district gathered. Carriages, gigs and coaches of all sorts rattled merrily along the post-roads and country lanes as though on their way to a fair—it was difficult to imagine where so many gentry appeared from in the district.

There was room only for the old people, the ladies and girls in the little Kolyvan church, the remaining guests sat around the church porch, holding flowers and oats with which to shower the prince and princess.

Father Vasily, wearing his golden robes, read the service in a honeyed voice, the young couple stood on a crimson rug and near them a boy in a blue shirt held an icon. The church was filled with the soft talk and whispers of the well-dressed ladies. Yekaterina Alexandrovna, with a candle in her hand, gazed at the light seriously and serenely.

"So sweet. An angel!" whispered the ladies.

The prince, looking very small in his black frock-coat, serious of mien and pale, was following the solemn marriage service attentively.

When the priest offered the wine the prince scarcely touched the rim of the chalice with his lips but Katya drank the wine to the dregs, not pausing for a second, as though she were suffering a great thirst. The choir sang a hymn and the priest joined the hands of bride and bridegroom. Katya, overcoming the resistance of the heavy silk with her knee and dragging her train behind her, walked quickly round the lectern and everybody

saw how badly the prince limped trying to keep up with his bride.

"He's small fry compared with her," decided the ladies.

The guests, headed by the young couple, made their way from the church to Volkovo. As they left Kolyvan, Katya saw Doctor Zabotkin—he had climbed on to the fence and was waving a handkerchief. She turned quickly away.

In the great hall Alexander Vadimych, carrying an ancient icon, the Miraculous Saviour, met the young people, blessed them and in full view of all the guests ordered the dowry to be brought. Four boys in crimson shirts brought in a huge silver tray with stacks of gold coins on it.

"Here, prince, don't think poorly of us, we give what we have got," said Volkov.

After receiving his blessing the prince and princess disappeared through different doors, changed their clothes and, finding each other again in the garden, sat down by the pond until the carriage was ready. The guests turned out on to the porch and crowded the windows; with loud shouts they sped the couple on their way. Volkov's eyes were moist. The banquet lasted until sunset. At dusk, in the neighbouring room, where a month before Katyenka had danced in the moonlight, an orchestra began playing. . . .

Soon, however, there were few gentlemen left still capable of holding on their feet and the girls had to dance with each other. The gay young sparks retired to the smoking-room whence came loud roars of laughter. The old people took to the card-tables. By midnight, the conductor, who was still waving his baton, fell forward on his nose, grabbed the big drum and rolled to the floor with it like a corpse.

This put an end to the dancing and the ladies with daughters drove away while the young men and the

husbands without their wives spent the night there—some playing cards, others running wild in the house until morning. In the garden the Rtishchevs gave a demonstration of their strength and Alexander Vadimych, who had long since lost his head, now tried to separate squabblers, now sat down to the card-table, staring unseeingly at the cards and the candles, all the time trying to remember something.

Neither the pale dawn nor the hot July day had any cooling effect on the guests and it was only on the third day that the last of them left Volkovo to race their eager horses madly across country, chasing and overtaking each other, their harness bells clanging, scaring the peasants who, removing their caps, stood for a long time looking after the people in the disappearing carriages.

“Ugh, the dust you raise, you fat-bellied old devil,” they would say.

III

Doctor Zabolkin sat on the fence and waved his handkerchief after the newlyweds, expressing sincere satisfaction that at last everything had been properly fixed up. All this time Grigory Ivanovich had lived in a haze of sentimental satisfaction with himself and the world at large. This feeling of complacency had begun at the time when Sasha had been taken to the gardener’s booth and laid out on the wooden bed and he had remained alone sitting beside the young sleeping woman.

A candle-end stuck in a bottle standing on a barrel lit up the board walls of the booth, there were spider-webs in the corners, and the broken window was overgrown with shiny black ivy; Sasha lay on the bed between the stove and the wall, covered with a sheepskin coat.

Occasionally she shuddered in her ague, pulled at the sheepskin coat and exposed her bare legs, or the skirt

of the coat would slip down and Grigory Ivanovich would get up and carefully straighten it.

Bending over her he looked long into her face—it was humble and he felt that in a dream he had somewhere seen and loved that face with its sweet clear-cut features. His spirit was calm, the whole of that day had become a memory and it was strange now to think of some other world outside that dilapidated hut and the sleeping Sasha.

Grigory Ivanovich again sat down by the candle and shielding the light with his hand listened to Sasha's breathing or to a bird suddenly awakening and disturbing the leaves of a bush or to the leaves of an aspen that had suddenly begun to rustle. The breeze that came through the window made the candle flicker and Sasha's face seemed to be wearing a frown from the shadows that moved across her eye sockets. It occurred to Grigory Ivanovich that it was only this silence, full of significant meaning, that he should love, and that he should now become as serene and tender as the shadows on Sasha's face.

"How desperate she must have been, what torment she must have suffered, if, without making any complaint, she hurried, hurried to reach the pond, the water, the end. Who am I compared with such torment? A gnat, a piece of dirt," thought Grigory Ivanovich. "I came crawling to rich people, people revoltingly happy, I came here conceited, with my red mug. . . . Disgusting, quite disgusting. She will wake and ask how she is to live now. What can I answer her? That I will serve her to the end of my days—that's how I ought to answer. Here is a simple and clear task, here is a purpose in life: to serve such a woman, to make her forget. . . ."

Grigory Ivanovich did not notice that he was talking aloud. Sasha stirred, he turned round and saw that she had raised herself a little and was looking at him with

her big, dark eyes. Whether Sasha had been scared by his muttering or whether she recalled recent events or whether she was too weak—in any case she merely drew her legs under her and pulled the coat up to her chin and groaned.

Grigory Ivanovich immediately sat down by her head and stroking her hair began to talk about his recent thoughts.

“Master, dearest, you had better leave me. I don’t want anything, thank you very humbly,” answered Sasha; she and Grigory Ivanovich both began to cry, she bitterly and he from the joy of pity.

The first days after she went back to the inn Sasha lived as though she had forgotten everything. Grigory Ivanovich visited her daily, asked whether he could help her and with a cigarette in his mouth sat on the porch. Sasha, passing near him, would tell him he had better go inside as there were fleas in the yard; she was always busy at something, working in the yard, or in the house. One day he found Sasha in the garden, beside the fence. She was gazing out into the steppes, her face was calm and bore a look of importance, her eyes were gloomy, her head was covered with a black kerchief.

“I want to go away, I can’t stand it any longer,” she said.

Grigory Ivanovich then felt that there was nothing for him to live for. He was so distraught and so low in spirits that the only thing he could say was:

“Sasha, if I’m not too disgusting to you, perhaps you might marry me.”

Sasha had only a hazy memory of what Grigory Ivanovich told her that night and now she realized that he was unhappy, and she was sorry for him; he suddenly became as dear to her as a baby.

She now started running to the doctor every day. She washed the floors, windows and doors of his cottage,

mended his underclothes, herself fixed the stove in the bathhouse that stood half-ruined on the high cliff above the river. She heated the bathhouse and told Grigory Ivanovich to take a good steam bath. When he returned thoroughly steamed, tired and happy, Sasha was awaiting him with the samovar—the house was clean, there was a smell of freshly-washed floors, of sage and of the wax candle that was burning in the corner.

Whenever he spoke of marriage, however, she shook her head.

“We don’t need that, Grigory Ivanovich, it’s sinful and wrong.”

Then she saw that he slept badly, that he was suffering, that he shuddered when she accidentally touched him, and she agreed.

She cried till her head was fit to burst but she agreed: apparently you can’t go against the customary ways of man. Father Vasily, satisfied with the way things had turned out, married them at the end of the summer. At the wedding he drank three glasses of vodka and even danced: Grigory Ivanovich clapped his hands and Father Vasily stamped his feet, shouting, “Go round house, go round stove.”

IV

The summer seemed to have ended satisfactorily with the two weddings. Grigory Ivanovich and Sasha stayed on in their little cottage, waiting until the Zemstvo hospital was rebuilt.

Sasha let the inn and gave up all her time to her husband, trying to understand and please him, and not to annoy him with her rustic appearance; although the village immediately dubbed her “Mrs. Doctor” she continued to wear her kerchief and dark calico dresses. Grigory Ivanovich understood this and did not insist on

a change. He read aloud to her every day and tried not to hide a single thought or deed from Sasha, to be as one single person with her.

Prince and Princess Krasnopolsky travelled around Europe sending home postcards from different towns to the great astonishment of Volkov with whom geography was not a strong point; today, for example, a letter would come from Italy, tomorrow, another from France. "They jump round like fleas," he said to Kondraty who politely answered, "Hm!"

After the grain had been gathered in, Alexander Vadimych set about redecorating the prince's house at Miloye. A gang of plasterers, paper hangers and joiners hammered in the high rooms, the whole place smelt of paste, lime and shavings. Volkov himself would go to Miloye in the mornings and shout around the place so loudly that the workers called him the "Cannon-Boss" and were not a bit afraid of him.

At the end of September when, beginning with the provincial horse-fairs, the whole region woke up, when there were evening-parties, hunts and weddings, Alexander Vadimych expected the young couple to return and hurried the completion of the work at Miloye. Suddenly letters stopped coming from abroad. "Surely they haven't dashed off to America?" thought Volkov but a few days later he received a telegram: "Coming. Katya."

Alexander Vadimych began bustling about, selected the best trio of snow-white horses (this was to be a gift to the young couple on their arrival) and wavered for a long time: he was very anxious to go and meet them at the station himself but he refrained and gave the coachman very strict instructions, tapping him on the forehead with his finger as he did so:

"Listen to what I tell you; fly like the wind and as soon as you have brought the prince and princess home hurry back here. And don't forget to tell them that the

horses are a present." No sooner had the horses disappeared behind the hill than Alexander Vadimych became greatly disturbed, fell into a gloomy mood and sat down by the window. For some reason he was sorry for his daughter, Katya: "I married her off in too much of a hurry. She was a fine girl, modest, motherless. . . . What the devil was I thinking of then? My God, my God, nothing has turned out as it should. That's not the sort of husband she should have had."

The coachman returned in the evening riding a gelding from the prince's stable. He dismounted at the porch and came straight in to Alexander Vadimych whose head even began to shake from excitement.

"Well? Arrived safely?"

"Yes, Alexander Vadimych, safely, thank God."

"Were they in good spirits?"

"All right, everything, thank God."

"And how's the prince?"

"I sort of didn't see him."

"What d'you mean, didn't see him? Why don't you speak? Speak, or I'll knock your head off."

"The prince, you see, didn't come. Our young lady came alone."

Alexander Vadimych merely opened his mouth wide. Kondraty came in with the candles. Volkov, sitting in his armchair, turned his eyes towards him and said:

"There's been some trouble, Kondraty Ivanovich."

"What's wrong?"

"Go over there at once and find out. Oh, my God, I felt it in my heart. . . ."

V

Yekaterina Alexandrovna had actually come alone, without her husband. She was met by the steward and went immediately into the drawing-room and removed

her travelling-coat, hat and veil. She stood at the window and looked out for a long time at the park, at the Volga below the house and the fields beyond the river. For a long, long time she stood staring out of the window. She sighed and then turned to the steward who had fastened his blue jacket as much as it would go to prevent his fat belly sticking out too much, and was waiting respectfully.

"The prince will be coming later," began Yekaterina Alexandrovna, frowning. "He's been delayed by business. You will give me an account of all household affairs and show me all the books."

"Do you wish to see the house first, madame, or the books?" asked the steward.

"Bring the books later," and she went round all the rooms asking where the prince's study was, which was the bedroom, where he liked most of all to sit. . . .

The ground-floor rooms were high and cold. Katyenka went upstairs to the prince's rooms but just glanced at them and ordered the servants to lock up all the rooms upstairs and down, except the dining-room, till spring; for herself she selected the small drawing-room with stained-glass windows and the piano and next to it a little room, all in white where her bed and a washstand were placed beside a tiled stove, round like a tower. . . .

When the steward with his squeaking boots had gone Katyenka returned to the drawing-room and sat down at a table behind the columns, leaning on its mirror-like surface (her pretty arms in sleeves that were tight-fitting to the elbows were reflected in it), leaned her cheek against her interclasped fingers and again looked out at the park, the river and the fields.

Her face had grown thinner, her abundant hair was darker and she wore it twisted round her head like a coronet; her dark travelling-dress with lace at the neck was severely cut and warm, like that of a woman who would

not permit herself a sudden movement or a dangerous thought if it would upset her tranquillity.

In the garden outside leaves were wilting and falling. Between the dark cones of the fir-trees the drooping, already partly leafless birches showed a tender yellow and the sky peeped through their sparse foliage. The old maple in the glade had spread its branches and was glowing all purple as though it were just ready to drop off into a gloomy sleep. The lindens were still green but the tall poplars were quite bare and their bronze leaves carpeted the paths and mown grass. As she looked out at the fading garden and at the blue river where a ferry was just crossing, Katyenka realized that this was the beginning of a long, a terribly long period of tranquillity.

She was firmly resolved not to recall the past three months—to lock them securely away and to arrange her life intelligently and severely.

Breathing in the scent of the fading garden that came with the wind through the half-open window, she felt a hot drop on her cheek.

“No, I mustn’t,” she said. “What has been decided must be done.”

She turned round quickly, looking for her handkerchief, got up, took her handbag, got a handkerchief and wiped her eyes, poured some perfume on to her fingers, daubed it on her temples and rang the bell. When the footman came Katyenka told him to fetch her writing-case from her trunk.

Twilight had set in and this was a time that Katyenka feared more than anything else. Standing with her back to the window she waited until the lights were lit. The footman returned with a red morocco writing-case; he climbed on to a chair and one by one lit the candles in the chandelier over the table.

A warm light immediately fell on the plaster carving of the ceiling and on the white walls, and drove the blu-

ish shadows behind the columns, warming up the gilt on the scroll capitals.

Katyenka sat down at the big table, thought a little and then wrote:

“Alexei, I forgive you. I thought a lot on my way home and I have decided that you must live with me; that is essential to give me peace. We will be like brother and sister, like friends.”

She read what she had written, tapped her heel on the parquet, lifted the rustling sheet of paper with the intention of tearing it up, changed her mind and put it into an envelope and sealed it.

Just then the high oak door at the end of the room began opening softly and a wrinkled shaven face appeared in the doorway.

“Kondraty!” exclaimed Katyenka.

With a sob he ran towards her and kissed her shoulder.

“Good-evening, dearest friend,” she began, putting her hands on the old man’s temples and kissing him. “How’s everybody at home? How’s Papa?”

“Darling Katyenka, we have longed so much to see you again, that’s all we old people live for, we thought only of you.”

“Did you? I thought so. Of course I should’ve gone straight to Papa, but I came here. But I felt very bad, Kondraty.”

“And where’s the prince?” he asked in a whisper.

“I don’t know, Kondraty, I don’t know anything. I was a bit vexed.”

She again took her handkerchief from her bag and burst out crying. Kondraty touched her hair and looked into her face.

“Kondraty, my husband has left me,” said Katya.

“Good heavens!”

When she had calmed down a little she told him ev-

everything that had happened. Kondraty did not speak for a long time, pressed his trembling lips together and then spoke, waving a threatening forefinger:

"So that's the sort he is! No, Katynusha, he won't get away with this."

Katyenka did not want to spend the night at Miloye and at about midnight she and Kondraty drove to Volkovo. When they reached the dam Katyenka began to feel excited as she smelt the familiar odours of the ponds and the rook nests. The carriage lamps showed up the foot-bridge across the ditch, the corner of the barn by the porch (it seemed small and narrow). There was a light in the first two windows and Katya could distinguish her father's bowed head at one of them.

"Now don't you breathe a single word, understand?" she whispered hurriedly, pulling at Kondraty's sleeve.

VI

When Alexander Vadimych, holding his dressing-gown round him, ran to the entrance hall, kissed his daughter and asked, "Little girlie, joy of my heart, what's the matter?" Katyenka lied to him and said that the prince had been detained in St. Petersburg on urgent business.

Volkov believed her—he was not the sort that would not believe, he did not understand cunning and did not ask for details of the business that had detained the prince: it's other people's business anyway, if you start asking too many questions you'll get entangled like a bumble-bee in a spider's web.

He immediately began calling Katyenka little princess and took her into the small dining-room where a big samovar was sending steam up to the ceiling.

"You are beautiful, by God, a thoroughbred, Katyenka," said Alexander Vadimych taking his daughter by the

shoulders and turning her round. He poured tea for her himself and offered her all sorts of things to eat. Tears rose to Katyenka's eyes but she drove them back by screwing her eyes up tight.

"I was so miserable without you," said her father, "you know I've got out of the habit of living alone. I don't go anywhere. Everybody is angry with me. And then there was another trouble: I bought a steam engine, we dragged it across the Kolyvanka River and it broke through the bridge. The funnel is still sticking out of the water. And how did you like your trip? I called you jumping fleas. And how's the prince? Oh, yes. Will you sleep in your old bed? I can see you're tired from travelling. You know, Katya, I'm very glad to see you."

After tea, Alexander Vadimych, chattering and fussing, took his daughter to the old room of her girlhood. Katyenka was getting more and more miserable: she had cheered up on the way home but her father, his talk and everything else around her only saddened her. Had she become unaccustomed to it all or had she grown older? As she said good-night to Alexander Vadimych at the door with the carpet she realized more than ever that she was alone in the world and that there was nothing she could do about her loneliness.

No changes had been made in her room. Katyenka's heart beat fast when she went in and saw her dressing-table, her Karelian-birch armchairs, her bed and even her slippers on the rug. But the former cosiness, the smell of perfumes or the freshness of spilled water—all were gone and the cold of a room that had long been unoccupied chilled her shoulders when she removed her dress and sat on the bed to stare at the darkened window.

It seemed as though another Katyenka had lived here, a happy and innocent girl who had died and whom she was very sorry for. Her memories of Alexander Vadimych were also sorrowful—he wanted so to please her:

he fussed about, talked of trifles, and now he was offended by her indifference to everything, because she had gone to bed immediately and had not kissed him good-night; he was probably sitting in his study sighing.

Katyenka got up and thought of going to her father to tell him that she loved him a lot and needed a little tenderness herself. She shook her head, however, and crawled in between the cold sheets.

"It's a pity I haven't got a sister," she thought. "I would take her into bed with me and kiss her pretty hair and tell her that it's hard, very hard for women to live."

The following days passed in a quiet and even sadness. Katyenka wandered slowly about the house, listening with a smile to her father whom her presence made happier and who showed her the letters he was then sorting and his diaries (his latest fad); she sat on a bench in the garden, her head raised, looking at a faded leaf that had got caught in a spider-web on its way to the ground and swayed there and could fall no farther. The trees looked like gold against the dark blue sky in the way they do in the clear days of an Indian summer.

Then she went back to Miloye. It was too difficult for her to hide the truth from her father. Time passed in endless monotony with nothing to disturb the even tenor of its way. The local landowners would have come visiting the young princess but they had been informed that Yekaterina Alexanbrovna was sick.

The landowners were offended and Tsuruyapa began stealthily spreading rumours.

VII

Katya was awaiting an answer from her husband and in order not to think, not to become too bored she went around the estate every day, dressed in a velvet coat trimmed with grey fur.

Autumn was far advanced. In the morning the frost lay on the yellow grass giving it a dove-grey appearance. The frost lay for a long time on the slopes of the roofs, on the rim of the well where icy water that smelt of silt was drawn from a great depth, on the balustrades of the balconies and on the leaves of the trees.

Every morning Katyenka went to the stables and the stable-men gave lively answers to her questions and smiled at her as though she were a little girl. The steward, seeing Katya about the estate, bowed to her from a distance and busied himself around the barns clanking his keys loudly (Katyenka did not like the steward and he was offended because she never invited him to her table). She asked the shepherd about the sheep—whether a wolf had not carried one off that night—and looked in at the farm-yard, covered with cow dung. The cow-girl, sitting on a stool, was milking a cow, with the warm milk streaming with a clang into the bucket; she let go of the cow dugs and, wiping her mouth, bowed her head in greeting to the young mistress. Once the cow-girl asked how old Katyenka was and when she was told she called her “miss” and “honey.”

Near the servants' quarters eight girl day-labourers were chopping cabbage in a short trough, their chopping knives clanging busily the whole day. Heads of cabbage lay on a tarpaulin and two dirty-faced boys, sitting beside it on their heels, were chewing the chilled cabbage roots with their sharp teeth.

When the girls saw the mistress they turned their rosy faces towards her and began whispering together. Katyenka looked into the trough, smelt the sweet garlicky odour of the cabbage, asked whether they had chopped much cabbage and smiling at the healthy-looking girls asked:

“Aren't any of you married yet?”

“There's Froska there who would be celebrating but all

the boys run away from her cross-eyes, they're afraid she won't recognize her husband in the dark."

They all laughed heartily at plain Froska's expense. Katyenka thought sadly, as she walked away, that she would again have to spend the day alone.

At home she folded her hands behind her back and walked up and down the room or sat down by the stove and leaned her back and her head against the warm tiles looking through the window at the sky where clouds, heavy with snow, were drifting down from the north.

The snow came suddenly—in the morning it hid the grass, covered the garden seats and lay in cushions on the tree-stumps. The trees were white with snow. A cool, white, opal light poured into the high rooms. The stoves were heated. Runners were spread on the floor and there were the marks left by felt boots around the entrance.

When Katyenka awoke that morning she was so pleased with the clean white light, with the snow on the window-sills and the fires burning in the stoves that she hurriedly donned her fur coat and felt boots and ran through the glass door into the garden.

The frost nipped her cheeks. Her boots left footprints in the snow that went deep down to the frozen grass. Katyenka laughed as she picked up handfuls of snow.

"It's lovely, oh Lord, it's lovely!"

It was as though this snow, these jolly white trees peeping up motionlessly from behind the hill with their sunlit snow-capped tops, had given her the feeling that her sorrow would pass.

She did as she used to do at home in Volkovo: she tucked her coat and skirt tightly round her legs and slid down the snowy slope to the river. Laughing she turned to walk up the slope again but she was out of breath and walked down to the water. Near the banks the river was frozen but out in midstream the leaden-grey oily water foamed and gurgled carrying little balls of snow on its

surface. Katyenka shivered from the cold and sat down under the trees with her face to the river. Somewhere up above her a dog barked and a footman called her to come to breakfast.

A hare, hearing the barking of the dog, jumped out from behind a nearby bush. Katyenka laughed again as she watched the dog, dashing down the slope like a snowball, give chase to the hare.

The whole day was a pleasant one for Katyenka and she waited, expecting her father to come now that the snow would bear a sleigh; he did not come, however, and she had to spend the evening alone, in an armchair beside the stove.

Either she had become too excited in the frost or the stoves had been overheated, but Katyenka discovered that she had a slight chill, shivers were running up and down her back and her cheeks were flaming. She sank back deep into the armchair, crossed her legs and smiled as she gazed at the fire. She thought of Alexei Petrovich, when for the first time—it had been in Moscow—he had kissed her, insistent and pale, speaking words that she had no right to think of at this time of loneliness.

Katyenka tried to pull herself together, she wanted to get up, but she was so exhausted that she could not move—it seemed as though somebody was flashing pictures before her eyes—her mind was filled with memories, with exciting scents, with everything that her strict resignation had long held back. She closed her eyes tightly, laid her hands on her breast and memories seared and blinded her like a blizzard.

VIII

Winter had come into its own. Blizzards drove along the frozen river, howled through the bare willow bushes, whirled into the fields tearing up the snow and piling up

drifts under the frozen bushes, against haystacks in the steppes and against the body of the fallen traveller.

That winter Grigory Ivanovich read a lot—he had ordered books and magazines from St. Petersburg. He began the magazines by glancing through the articles, marked some of the lines with a pencil, thought over them for a long time and then read the feature stories to Sasha, seeking all the time for an answer to the question: how should one live?

Having made a sacrifice in the summer, Grigory Ivanovich had calmed down, but not for long: the sacrifice did not seem to have been a real one, it was more like a pleasure, and he wanted to accomplish a lot.

Times were unsettled, not like it had been formerly. Some of the articles that found their way into the newspapers were so challenging that they made you catch your breath—his undergraduate years in Kazan seemed child's play compared to this. One article in a newspaper (in the provinces the paper came only to subscribers and in St. Petersburg it sold for fifty rubles) seemed to open Grigory Ivanovich's eyes: he saw that there was a path to follow for a man with a conscience. And what a path! One to lay down one's life for.

There were many nights when Sasha did not get a chance to sleep as she listened to Grigory Ivanovich who ran up and down the room trying to prove to her how a man should live. A shadow darted along the wall following him and Sasha would stare in fear as she listened to her husband. The doctor was very excited and had decided to begin a new life without any procrastination, but it all came to a bad end very unexpectedly.

On a cold night when a blizzard was blowing, Grigory Ivanovich was sitting at his pinewood table reading. Sasha was busy behind the partition and by the rattle of the crockery the doctor knew that tea would soon be ready.

The blizzard howled around the corner of the house

and it sounded as though the devil, his paws drawn up under him, were sitting on the roof grumbling at the cold.

"An awful blizzard, good heavens, somebody might get snowed under in the steppes," said Sasha from the other room.

The doctor, shading the lamp with his hand, looked at the frosted window-pane. The needle-like icicles and the frost fronds on the glass were occasionally lit up with a blue light from the moon that dived and leaped at a tremendous height amongst the black clouds from which the snow was falling.

"Do you know," began Grigory Ivanovich, "I keep thinking that in St. Petersburg, at a table somewhere, a clever and honest man is sitting and writing and I am here, two thousand versts away, assimilating his thoughts—astounding! What right have I to remain inactive!"

"Who's that?" asked Sasha. "Is it somebody from here or somebody you met somewhere?"

"Oh, you don't understand," answered the doctor, placing his hands on the book. "I tell you, Sasha, I'm not living the proper way—it's too comfortable and tranquil: an unconscionable life! Do you understand that? It can't go on. I have no right to live in comfort when people there are dying for me. I must 'raise my head'—I've just read about that here. And it is your duty not to hold me back in safety but to encourage and inflame me. That's what real women do."

Grigory Ivanovich's voice even trembled from the excitement. Sasha came out from behind the partition, stood near her husband's chair, folded her arms, lowered her eyes and said softly:

"Forgive me, Grigory Ivanovich."

He should have laughed then and explained things to Sasha—she would have understood everything. He did

not do so, however, and angry with himself for his own weakness, blamed his wife who, as he now believed, had created this "philistine comfort."

Just at that moment, sleigh bells, caught by the wind, tinkled outside the cottage, the snow crunched and they could hear the breathing of horses near by.

"Surely you won't go out in this weather, Grigory Ivanovich? It's so bad, you'll get snowed under," said Sasha, going back into the other room.

"Not much pleasure in it," he muttered. "One of the landowners got a belly-ache." He tossed back his hair, slammed the book to, got up, and pushing with his knee at the cost of considerable trouble, opened the outer door that was swollen and stuck tight.

The great clouds of steam that came swirling into the outer room prevented him from seeing anything but somebody had already entered the house. Grigory Ivanovich stared, stepped back and gasped: Katya was standing in the doorway.

Her black fur coat was covered with snow, her face showed red from under her hood, her eyelashes were white. She pushed the door to, pulled off her mittens, stamped her feet and said:

"You didn't expect me? I almost got lost. I was on my way to Papa and the snow is piled up so that you can't get across the bridges. I saw the light and turned in here. May I come in?"

She was unfastening the big buttons of her coat. Grigory Ivanovich recovered himself, took her coat from her—it was warm inside and smelt of fur and perfume, and he took her hood.

Katyenka's hair had become disarranged under the hood, she put it in order and sat down at the table.

"Where's Sasha?" she asked.

"In there," answered Grigory Ivanovich, nodding towards the partition. "We have been reading and were

just going to have some tea." He glanced sideways at Yekaterina Alexandrovna as though he were ready to hide or run away.

"Sasha, it's I, come on out," said Katyenka, arranging the lace on her dark dress; she smiled suddenly.

Grigory Ivanovich opened his mouth and drew breath with great difficulty.

At last Sasha came out, holding her hands under her black blouse; she bowed, her head only, slowly and with dignity. Katyenka put her arms round Sasha's neck and kissed her.

"Still the same beauty," she said. "How are you getting on? All right?"

"Thank you, everything is fine," answered Sasha slowly without raising her eyes.

Katyenka kissed her again but Sasha was as unresponsive as stone and Katya took her hands from her shoulders. Grigory Ivanovich looked at both women and frowned painfully, realizing how difficult this meeting was for Sasha. Although he frowned he nevertheless compared the two women: Sasha seemed vulgar and heavy while everything about Yekaterina Alexandrovna was graceful, her movements, her fine hair, piled high, her voice like music, her dress soft and delightful.

Grigory Ivanovich was indignant that such thoughts should come to him but no matter how hard he tried to look indifferent his eyes saw of their own accord things which they should not have seen and which it was sinful to see—the twists of hair, the upturned corner of the mouth, the folds of the dress on her breast rising and falling as she breathed.

At last one of the tendons under his knee began trembling like a mouse. It was so disagreeable that he spoke in rough tones:

"Well, is the samovar ready at last?"

Sasha turned round slowly and went out of the room.

They could hear her blowing into the samovar and the rattling of the samovar chimney as she removed it. There was a faint smell of smoke. Katyenka turned over the pages of the magazine, then threw it down, leaned on the table and said:

"I wrote twice asking you to come. I was not well. Why didn't you come?"

"I couldn't," answered Grigory Ivanovich.

Sasha brought in the samovar and wiped the dishes, calm and concentrated but without raising her eyes.

"I spend all my days alone. I listen to the wind howling. . . . I think and think. . . . Oh, God, I haven't done so much thinking in all my life! And here, in your house, even the wind is cosy. I like your place. I even envy you." Katyenka suddenly smiled and looked Grigory Ivanovich straight in the eyes. He drew his head into his shoulders but was unable to tear himself away from her cold, strange, grey eyes. "And do you remember," she began again, "how funny you cut your hair that time? Afterwards Kondraty told me how he cut your queue off with his scissors."

Grigory Ivanovich could feel that his face was flushed and that he was lost. At last, turning to the door, Sasha said:

"Grigory Ivanovich, go out and fetch the milk, the ending. I'm in my stockings and feet." Turning to Katyenka she said, "We have two cows, a piebald and a red one, and a bullock. Quite a farm."

"You see, you understand," said the doctor's eyes and he immediately went out. He fumbled about the shelf in the cold outer room; he knew where the jugs stood, but he deliberately wanted some rubbish or other to fall down, but nothing did, so he took the jug and standing there in the darkness, whispered:

"Oh, hell!" and he wanted to smash the confounded pot, but he only frowned and clicked his tongue; he knew

that the evil had already been done and that the misfortune (or good fortune?) had arrived.

"Is this the pot you want?" he asked roughly, placing the jug in front of Sasha and sitting down in the shadows.

Coming in from outside, the room smelt strongly of perfume. Grigory Ivanovich got the idea that this was not perfume, but the scent of Katyenka's hair, hands and clothes.

She drank her tea slowly and her lips were red, very red. Sasha hid behind the samovar and busied herself wiping the cups. It occurred to Grigory Ivanovich that Sasha had grown fat, stubborn and bad-tempered.

"And she'll get still fatter yet. Thinks I'm her property. Thinks she did me a great honour. Sits there and hates her and I have to carry her jugs! It's foul, rotten. And me, I'm nothing but a scoundrel, anyway!"

Katyenka asked him whether he had much work. Grigory Ivanovich, looking to the side, away from her, answered that he had.

"I travel and travel over the whole district. I no longer resemble a human being. Ours is no princely life, we live up to our knees in dung. You don't get fat on it."

At that moment a saucer slipped out of Sasha's hands and was smashed. Katyenka gasped.

"Oh, what a pity," she said with so much feigned sympathy that Grigory Ivanovich snorted and suddenly exclaimed in a trembling voice:

"You've never seen poverty, have you? There it is, look at it!"

"What are you saying?" whispered Sasha, raising frightened eyes.

Yekaterina Alexandrovna's spoon trembled in her hand and rattled against the side of her glass. Grigory Ivanovich ran over to the stove and then turned round, his lips pressed tight.

"Squalor, as much as you want of it, more, even, than is necessary, but the spirit is still alive, that's something you can't crush. Yes, I don't want to offend you, Yekaterina Alexandrovna, but it hurts me to think that you have come to make fun of us. Let me tell you that there's nothing to laugh at. There is something else more important in our life than those pots there. Our life is a burning fire. We live by ideas! Compared with them all this squalor is a trifle. I can afford to ignore it even if my own personal life is a failure. It has failed and here I am, one more fighter!"

Grigory Ivanovich said much more of the same sort. Katyenka listened with her head bowed. At last, when he sat down suddenly on the bench, as though he himself were trying to make sense of his tangled words, Yekaterina Alexandrovna rose up from the table.

"You did not understand me," she said. "I live quite alone, I have nobody to speak a word to. Today I thought of you and Sasha, you seemed to be close to me and I came to make friends with you. Apparently nothing has come of it. Good-bye, my friends. It was not to be."

She put on her fur coat, slowly fastened the buttons, pulled on her fluffy white mittens, smiled sadly, bade them farewell again and went out.

Grigory Ivanovich was unable to utter a single word--everything that he had just said seemed to have flown out of his head like a whirlwind. Sasha, again folding her arms under her blouse, said to him softly:

"Anyway, there was no need to insult a guest, Grigory Ivanovich."

Then, just as he was, in his black shirt and hatless, he ran out into the yard.

The moon had finished its mad drive across the heavens and was now floating slowly in the frosty heights, round and clear. The three greys harnessed to the sleigh were rattling their harness bells. The bluish snow was

piled up in a steep drift beside the porch. Sinking into it up to his knees Grigory Ivanovich ran to Katyenka who turned round to him as she stood near the sleigh.

"Yekaterina Alexandrovna, I did not wish to offend you. . . . Oh, Lord, please understand me."

"I understand you," she raised her eyes and looked at the moon.

"Yekaterina Alexandrovna, may I see you home?"

"Yes."

Grigory Ivanovich ran back into the house and threw on his sheepskin coat.

"I want to see Yekaterina Alexandrovna home," he muttered fearfully and hurriedly. "I can't let her go alone especially as I have offended her. I'll be back late, possibly not till tomorrow morning," and he hesitated standing in the doorway. Sasha did not answer him but gathered up the tea-things.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked. "Don't you want me to take her home?"

"As you will, Grigory Ivanovich, do as you think best."

"What has it to do with what I will?" He came back from the door and his voice trembled. "I can't stand such answers. Can't I even see her home if I want to?"

"What answers of mine make you so angry, Grigory Ivanovich?"

There and then he sat down on the bench and pressed his clenched fists to his temples.

"Intolerable!"

The harness bells tinkled outside as Katyenka got into the sleigh; Grigory Ivanovich jumped up and spoke in a voice of despair.

"For Christ's sake don't be so angry, I can't leave you like that."

"Never mind, I'll bear it," answered Sasha and went behind the partition.

"Oh, to hell with it!" he grunted. "I won't go!" And he ran out through the gates.

The horses were already moving.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" shouted Grigory Ivanovich running after the wide back of the sleigh and stumbling through the deep snow.

IX

The moon shone through the frosted window of the sleigh and showed up the dreary snow-covered plain that stretched away and merged with the sky. The sleigh runners creaked, monotonous bells clanked like glass. Whenever the sleigh turned a bend Katyenka's finely chiselled face appeared out of the darkness in its frame of grey fur and flashes of moonlight played in her eyes.

Grigory Ivanovich looked at her and felt that he had dragged through the whole of his life for the sake of this moment. Now he wanted nothing better than to stare at that bewitching face and to breathe the penetrating scents of the snow, perfume and warm furs.

"You know that my husband has left me?" said Yekaterina Alexandrovna, appearing in the bluish light.

Grigory Ivanovich started, thought that he had to answer that and suddenly, as though he had only been awaiting a signal, he began talking in a soft but entirely new and particular sort of voice which, however, he felt was his true voice; he told her what he had seen in the summer, how the clouds had risen from the river and drifted away over the forest, how his heart had been filled with love and how he had seen Katyenka approaching the bank in a boat and had realized that his love was for her. He told her about the bees circling over the grass and that his love had been so great and so fine that it

seemed impossible that a man could bear such love, he had wanted to give it up to the sky, to the earth, to people.

“And what about Sasha?” Katyenka suddenly asked softly. Her face looked so strange at that moment, of such a tormenting beauty, that Grigory Ivanovich groaned and fell back into the depths of the sleigh. Katyenka stroked his shoulder. He seized her hand and pressed his lips to the soft perfumed mitten.

“I love you,” he muttered. “Let me die for you.”

He held her by the hand repeating those words in a dull voice and when the sleigh bounced over the ruts he seemed to be bowing to her. His face, not at all handsome, was excited.

Katyenka was filled with melancholy. At first she felt like making fun of Grigory Ivanovich, and telling him that she had not been on her way to her father's that day but had come to him, she had come deliberately because of her bad temper and boredom, to torment him. That he seemed ridiculous, that his love, like those bows, was comical, and indeed, the only thing to do for such a love was to die. She did not, however, say any of this. She wanted to cry long and bitterly.

“Look at me. Love me for just one minute,” breathed Grigory Ivanovich.

Then Katyenka pulled her hand away from him. He did not resist, he only dropped down to her feet and rested his face on her knees. Her gloom and depression grew still deeper from this action.

Neither of them noticed that the sleigh had begun to rock; suddenly it turned off the road and rushed downhill. The coachman was unable to hold the young horses on the road and in their mad sideward rush they raced straight downhill on to the ice of the river.

The horses, churning up the snow and ploughing breast-high through the drifts, reached the river. The ice

cracked, the sleigh swayed and sank down and the black water swirled into it.

Katyenka screamed. Grigory Ivanovich hurriedly threw open the right-hand door that was not under water. Between the thin ice-floes, the horses thrashed about in the running water, which glittered in the moonlight. The shaft-horse held on to the ice with its forefeet—it suddenly neighed, a long, complaining note. The left trace-horse snorted, only its muzzle was visible above the water. The right trace-horse was being pulled away by the current.

“We’re drowning!” screamed the coachman from his box.

In the darkness Grigory Ivanovich seized Katyenka like a precious treasure, pushed her out of the sleigh, saying, “Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid. . . .” She caught hold of the framework of the hood, the sleigh careened over dangerously and Grigory Ivanovich was in the water up to his waist.

THE RETURN

I

Alexei Petrovich was travelling second-class on a fast steamer from Rybinsk and had lain for several days in his cabin without going out, not from any sort of indisposition but simply because he had no inclination to move and talk—he just drank and slept.

In the pocket of his crumpled jacket were his last hundred rubles, wrapped up in newspaper. Alexei Petrovich pretended that he did not know himself why he had boarded the steamer: he was like a sick dog with the fur hanging from his coat in tufts, so dirty, foul and miserable was it all.

After a year of riotous living Alexei Petrovich had descended to the lowest depths—nothing was left for him but death in a doss-house and he now felt some sort of satisfaction, even a pleasant sort of thrill: his conscience did not bother him, he did not remember anything, and there was, indeed, no time for memories. When he awoke in his cabin, he cleared his throat, drank some vodka and sat down at the table by the mirror, yawned or played patience, until he again fell into a drunken sleep.

Before their marriage, when he had declared his intentions to Katyenka, seated on a garden seat, he had said that if she had wanted to marry him he would not have married her. It was then that Katyenka realized that he needed a "sacrifice." Alexei Petrovich really did need a "sacrifice," but one of a special kind (this she did not fully realize): it had to be living, warm, eternal. There are sacrifices that are final and irrevocable, when a person gives himself up entirely, disappears completely, and the memory of it worries the conscience and you feel unworthy. There are sacrifices that are fiery, joyful, instantaneous and memories of them make you sorry they cannot be repeated. Alexei Petrovich was a man who could live in only one way: if there was a loving woman hovering near him, a woman with a tormented heart, without any will-power, who was always ready to give up her whole self for a kind word. He had to feel a constant, gentle reproach, a sweet burden, a sorrow at his inability to give her all the happiness that she deserved, to be able to plunge head first into that melancholy of love, to drink deeply of it as of a bitter, enchanting, unholy drink.

Such had been his relations with Sasha. When her calm sacrifice developed into the irrevocable sacrifice he was filled with horror, and Katya seemed to be his only salvation. She was loving, tender and beautiful. The prince assumed that their alliance would be like a sad

backwater in autumn—the last sorrowful refuge on this earth.

After she slapped his face, however, rage and passion were aroused in him: that slap reminded him of his past, with the only difference that here he was the master, he was the arbiter of fate.

During the first days of their honeymoon Alexei Petrovich seemed to fear that Katyenka would come to herself and would realize the full horror of their alliance, and he was polite to the point of insolence and very considerate. But she, little as she herself expected it, when she became a woman, suddenly and ardently fell in love with her husband, just as though she had emerged into a blazing light out of the gloom. It was a seething recognition of herself, the fiery heat of her blood at boiling point. In the face of this emotion the whole past died out, was burned up—it was not worth remembering.

Katyenka pulled her husband into the whirlpool of a woman's first love. Equally suddenly, Alexei Petrovich dropped into days of forgetfulness, of exciting joy, of happy cares for sweet trivialities. It seemed that a second life had begun when he saw only Katyenka's eyes filled with an adoration that almost amounted to madness: for him there was neither past nor future, nothing but that excited, fathomless woman's look.

This happiness that made his head swim was not of long duration. Alexei Petrovich began to realize that he could not stand the tension and he lost his head. The first quarrel came. Katyenka was hurt and ashamed when her love was treated coldly, almost with ridicule. She felt how different she was from her husband—they were like two strangers. It happened in the evening, in an old hotel in Venice. Alexei Petrovich stood at the window looking out on to a narrow canal that glowed crimson in the rainy sunset. Katyenka was lying on a sofa crying.

"For God's sake, stop it, Katyenka, there's nothing

wrong," said Alexei Petrovich softly. "You wanted to kiss me and I was distraught. That's all. I was thinking that, after all, we've seen nothing properly in Venice but the restaurants. Don't you agree? I think it's just the evening dusk that has given you the blues. Or perhaps we're tired."

That all was quite true and there was nothing to cry about.

But Katyenka herself did not know why she was so sad, it was as though the sun had disappeared forever beyond the distant rim of the sea and that all her life would now be hopeless and gloomy.

On the water below a black gondola slid noiselessly by. The prince, leaning on the window-sill, watched the narrow bows of the boat cutting into the reddish water. The lady sitting in the gondola lowered her lorgnette and raised her face as she turned to speak to the gondolier. Alexei Petrovich recognized Mordvinskaya.

He staggered back from the window and looked at Katya. She was now sitting with her head lowered. The handkerchief on her knees gleamed white in the dusk. Alexei Petrovich felt a rending pity for this pure, sweet, ununderstanding young woman. He dropped to his knees beside the sofa, took her hand and pressed it to his lips, but the hand was unresponsive and his lips were cold. It was becoming clear to him that he did not love her but the other, and that no sacrifice could drown that love.

The next day the Krasnopolskys left for Rome and then went on to Genoa, Nice and Paris.

Alexei Petrovich could not have said for certain whether it was Mordvinskaya who had slipped past him like a ghost in the black gondola, or whether it was a resemblance that had deceived him. But whatever it was, the door to the secret chamber of his heart had been opened, a door that had been kept tightly shut since the night when Anna Semyonovna had inveigled him into the cob-

web of her loving tenderness and had poisoned him with her kisses. He now realized that he had been deceiving himself all the time and the deception that had been so skilfully built up had collapsed at one glimpse of that woman; that he would forgive and forget everything, even the whip lash across his eyes, for a meeting with Mordvinskaya; that he had neither will nor pride, nothing but a tortured heart that was at any moment ready to burn up with the deadly flames of love.

Suddenly he had ceased to care whether Katyenka would leave him or whether she would suffer to the end of her days by his side, or whether, like Sasha, she would make the silent sacrifice. She was silent, sad, but still did not dare ask why he had so suddenly changed.

In Paris, Alexei Petrovich sometimes left Katyenka alone at the hotel for a whole day. She would sit at the window and wait. Below her, on the *Place de l'Opéra*, the traffic streams intersected, people ran across the square and she could hear motor horns, whistles, chatter and the sound of wheels. Only a short distance divided her from all that bustle and this made her loneliness and her mortification all the more acute.

Sometimes Alexei Petrovich came home very late. Katyenka looked sorrowfully at his gaunt face with his tormented and apparently unseeing eyes. "I don't love him, I don't love him, it doesn't matter, let him go to the dogs," she repeated, wringing her hands. The prince would ask her to forgive him, explaining that he had wandered about the town the whole day but his words were confused, jumbled and incomprehensible. Then he would get into bed, stretch out his arms above the blankets and pretend to go to sleep.

In all this mix-up there was only one thing Katyenka could grasp—that her husband was persistently trying to meet somebody, that he went to restaurants, theatres, taverns, shops, sat in crowded cafés and wandered about

the boulevards. Katyenka tried to find out whom he was looking for, begged, threatened and wept, but the prince maintained his silence. Early one morning, when she glanced at his face, green in the morning light, with its deep-sunken, dull eyes, Katyenka sat on the bed, seized her head in her hands and said:

"I don't understand, I don't understand anything. It's all some sort of madness. . . . Lies, lies, lies!"

"Yes, madness and lies, Katya."

Katyenka could not bear up any longer, her pride was broken. She jumped out of bed and ran barefoot to the window, shouting that if he left her alone in that room again she would throw herself out into the street and under a carriage. Her despair was so profound and so unexpected that Alexei Petrovich seemed to regain his senses, began to soothe Katyenka and said reluctantly that it was time for them to go home, back to Russia.

All this had happened because, on their arrival in Paris, Alexei Petrovich had gone to the Embassy and there they had told him that Mordvinskaya was in Paris and alone, but that her address was not known. Then he began to search for Anna Semyonovna all over the town and actually saw her once or twice from a distance, but could not get close to her: she was with a tall young man, apparently the owner of a racing stable.

During the past week Alexei Petrovich had not met her anywhere: she had probably gone south, to Biarritz or Nice where the season had already begun.

In St. Petersburg autumn had already set in. Heavy wet clouds hung over the city. There was a smell of iron in the air. Pedestrians, busy and ill-tempered, with faces drawn from neurasthenia, did not even open their umbrellas, so accustomed were they to the dampness: let it pour.

On a day such as this the Krasnopolskys were driving along Morskaya on their way from the Warsaw Sta-

tion to the hotel. Katyenka did not want to stop but Alexei Petrovich referred to some business and the exhausting, monotonous days began. It poured with rain, a yellow electric light burned in the hotel room the whole day, the prince went out for short periods and spent the rest of the time on the sofa, he was either silent or he got irritated over trilles or he tried to persuade Katyenka to visit relatives which she flatly refused to do. Then Alexei Petrovich went out one morning and did not return that day, nor the night nor the next day.

This is what happened. When he left the hotel in the morning Alexei Petrovich hired a cab and drove along the Shpalernaya as usual. When he drew near to the Mordvinskys' house he shut his eyes in his excitement: windows that had been whitened with chalk the day before had now been cleaned, the blinds had been raised and within the room several electric lights were burning. Alexei Petrovich paid off the cab at the corner of the street and returned on foot to the house. His heart was beating so wildly that he had to press his hand against it. He rang, entered the house and gave the footman his card. What would happen next, whether the husband or she herself would come out and what he would do in either case, was something the prince had not thought about.

The footman did not return for a long time. "The scoundrel, he's deliberately keeping me waiting," thought the prince. The footman appeared at the far end of the hall and from there looked at the prince—impertinently, of course—and then disappeared. The blood rushed to Alexei Petrovich's head, he took a woman's black glove from the hall-stand under the mirror and tore it in two. The footman appeared again with a brightly coloured feather-duster, flicking away the dust as he walked. "Idiot!" shouted Alexei Petrovich and his voice resounded through the rooms. Somebody rang from inside the

house, the footman disappeared, and the prince, slamming the front door with all his strength, ran out into the street.

There was a drizzle outside, clouds of mist hung down over the roofs and the damp air bit into him to the bones. Alexei Petrovich walked slowly along the pavement. He had foreseen everything except the footman with the feather-duster.

"Now to forget myself as quickly as possible," he thought. "Only I must go somewhere that's as foul as possible." He now realized that this was the end. A footman with a feather-duster and the dreary drizzle had put an end to eighteen months' terrible tension. This was to have been expected for he himself was small, feeble and insignificant and if it were to rain harder he would be washed from the pavement into the gutter and down the drain. Then he thought of Katya. "No, no, it's a long way to her. I must not. Somewhere in a pub."

A horrible woman in a wet boa who seemed to have had flour sprinkled on her face, looked at him at the cross-roads.

"What are you looking so serious about, dearie?" she said in a hoarse voice and beckoned him to follow her.

The prince was nauseated but he immediately followed her.

The woman took him into a dowdy, evil-smelling room. Alexei Petrovich, without removing his hat and coat, sat down at the uncovered table and looked at photos of some volunteers pinned up over the old red sofa. Through a partly-open door he could see another woman, half-undressed and with her hair hanging down. Noticing that the prince was looking at her she showed her decayed teeth and came out. Behind her appeared a big fellow in a crimson shirt, curly-headed and with bags under his eyes. An accordion was hanging from a strap across

his shoulder. He bowed, shook his curls, placed a foot in a patent-leather boot on a chair and ran his fingers over the keys.

"Yes, yes, sing," said the prince. "I'll pay you."

The woman with the untidy hair adjusted her canary-yellow dressing-gown, snapped her fingers and began to sing—in an unexpected bass. The prince looked at her and took up the bottle that had appeared on the table he knew not how. The bepowdered woman sat down beside him and began to look at him closely. Her watery eyes were lashless. She adjusted a lock of hair that had fallen and a bedbug crawled out from under the false hair as she replaced it.

The prince smiled in disgust and said, "Good," and tossed off a full glass. The wine went to his head. The female bass sang, "I'll not wake the precious sleep of the young beauty with my fine song. . . ." The prince drank glass after glass of the sweetish, sickly wine. The sounds of the accordion seemed to draw farther and farther away. He wanted to get up in order, at last, to tear off that horrible wig full of bugs but he staggered and grabbing hold of the woman fell to the floor with her.

He awoke in an unknown room, not the one he had been in the day before, on an iron bedstead. His head ached tormentingly. He sat for a long time on the dirty mattress, recalled what had happened the day before and then staggered to the entrance hall. Bundles and boxes were piled up there and the portrait of some general stood on a chair. At the sound of the prince's footsteps a kitchen door opened, a puckered old woman stuck her head out, looked at him and disappeared again. The prince went out of the front door—it was a tall stone-built house and the one he had entered the day before had been a wooden house. "The devil alone knows what it's all about," he said and wandered for a long time on foot not finding strength enough either to call a cab or

to recollect where he had to go. A lamplighter ran along ahead of him, lighting the lamps, one after another. Alexei Petrovich glanced at the yellow reflections under his feet, shook his head and in his misery leaned against a damp wall. He felt in his pocket for a cigarette but there was neither cigarette case nor wallet in his pockets.

For the second time he remembered his wife. It was now that he noticed with surprise that he was so sullied, washed-out and unclean that it had become easy and sweet to think of her. Mordvinskaya seemed to have disappeared from his mind, her image had mingled with the mud of the street: everything connected with her must have died during that abominable night. This filled him with pleasure as though part of a tortuous journey was over, the most difficult and tormenting part had been overcome.

Bespattered with mud, soaking wet, but calm, Alexei Petrovich at last reached his hotel. The hall porter did not recognize him and the prince laughed—it meant that he had changed considerably during that night. When he reached the door of their room he removed his crushed silk hat, smoothed his hair with his hand and knocked.

Katyenka, wrapped in a white woollen shawl, was standing in the middle of the room. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes huge and dry.

“Where have you been?” she asked, glanced at him and turned away. “How awful!”

Without moving away from the door the prince said:

“Katya dear, I’m wet through, I can’t sit down, I’ll spoil everything you’ve got. But it’s good, so good that it all happened like this.” He shifted his weight from one foot to the other and smiled a crooked smile. “I don’t know whether I shall ever meet you again. But now I am saved, Katya.”

"You're raving, you ought to go to bed," she said to him hastily.

"No, no, d'you think I'm drunk? I'll explain everything to you."

The prince, sighing, glanced round the room, looked at his muddy boots, and then, for a single instant, with tremendous tenderness, almost beseechingly, he looked Katya in the face, lowered his eyes and began to relate everything in the proper order, beginning with the vision on the Venetian canal.

As Katya listened she walked over to the sofa and sat down—her legs would not support her. She understood everything right up to the present morning. But why Mordvinskaya's image should have disappeared from the prince's mind was something she could not get clear. And *this* alone was important to Alexei Petrovich now. He spoke about himself as though he were a new man, and yesterday's man, alien and hostile to him, had gone forever. All this seemed so obvious and so good to him and he felt so good and sure of himself that he could not understand why Katyenka was looking at him with such wrath on her face.

"Well, and have you thought about me at all?" she screamed at last, her face turning pink. "What am I to do now? How can I live with you?"

"You? Ah, yes. . . ."

Actually the whole conversation had tended to show that Katyenka should, at this moment, make a fiery sacrifice, surrender all her purity, all her miraculous feminine strength, and with it fill the prince's empty soul.

Alexei Petrovich realized this. It disgusted him more than ever before: what was he, indeed—a vampire? To live on the blood of others, to wax fat and then fall off.

"Katya, I am leaving you forever. Later on you will understand everything, everything," he said and suddenly he fell into a terrible ecstasy and his voice broke.

"My dear . . . remember, remember, come what may, I am always true, true, true to you unto death. Farewell."

Alexei Petrovich bowed low and left the room. That same day he gave his wife deeds for the whole value of his estate and full power of attorney, keeping only a few thousand rubles for himself. And that night he left for Moscow.

Alexei Petrovich had not a very clear idea what he was going to do in Moscow. He took a room in a cheap hotel and for the first days he waited for that moment of terrible ecstasy to repeat itself and to spread into a long and miraculous joy. It gradually became certain, however, that no miracle was going to happen and that his past life that had disappeared for a moment, hung over his head ready to drop on him at any minute. Then came days of intolerable despondency, the more torturing that he could see no way out but death. It was impossible to return to his wife. And the prince did not know where Katyenka was, what had happened to her after he left.

The despair increased. It was almost possible to say where the pain was—in the middle of his breast, under the central bone. The morning began with a sucking feeling in that place and by evening there was a weight of a millstone there. A glass of wine eased the pain. The prince started drinking brandy and then changed over to vodka. Then acquaintances appeared, strange enough to look at but all good people. The prince did not remember their names and just the same the faces became indistinct towards the end of the day, it was difficult for him to distinguish men from women and what did it matter, anyway? He often played cards and lost. Very little money remained in his possession.

In this hazy period—this forgetfulness of everything—there was one meeting, insignificant in itself, but one which made an impression on him. One day the prince

was walking past Iverskaya Church. The church was like an island where passers-by rested for a moment, removed their caps, crossed themselves, and looked up at the dark face of the icon and the candles. The prince also stopped and tried to recall a prayer, but he could not remember a single one and only looked at the opalescent light and the flashes reflected from the gold icon-frame. Just then a joyous voice behind him exclaimed, "Help the passer-by in the name of Christ, kind sir." The prince got out some small change and turned round. Before him stood a smiling young monk, his face was thin and pock-marked, his clear eyes a light blue. The prince looked into those eyes and also smiled—it seemed to him that the monk knew something that was very important, something that he had to know.

"Here are some coppers," said the prince. "If you come to my place I'll give you a ruble."

The prince did not remember whether the monk came to see him or not but it seemed to him that those penetrating blue eyes had appeared for a moment amongst the card-players, from behind the clouds of tobacco smoke.

Spring came. The prince wanted very much to think of Katyenka and in order not to do so he drank still more, drank without a pause. One day some boorish merchant-fellow came to his hotel room, called himself a Volga man and said he had known the prince on his estate, inquired boisterously into Alexei Petrovich's affairs and, amongst other things, told him of the accident that had occurred opposite Miloye during the winter.

From this garbled story it was possible to get an idea of what had happened on the Volga on that winter night.

The sleigh had slid from the high bank into the water through a hole in the ice but had not turned over because the shaft-horse had steadied it by getting its feet on the ice. The coachman had managed to cut the traces.

one of the trace-horses went under, the other had remained floundering in the water. The coachman had crawled along the shafts to the main sheet of ice, had grabbed the trace-horse by the tail and helped it out of the water, mounted it and rode across the river to get help from Miloye.

Katyenka lay on top of the sleigh unconscious. Grigory Ivanovich standing up to his waist in the water (the coachman's box was also under water and he was probably afraid to climb on top of the sleigh) took hold of Katyenka, laid his head on her breast and gazed at her open eyes.

The snow had again begun to fall and the wind grew stronger. The loose snow began to blow along the river in clouds, the snow-dust covered Katyenka's face like that of a corpse. It was so horrible that Grigory Ivanovich raised his head and screamed. The shaft-horse kicked and became weaker. The icy wind rocked the sleigh. Katyenka suddenly sat up, dropped her legs in their thin stockings over the side, looked round her, clapped her hands, seized Grigory Ivanovich's head and pressed it to her as though she feared to let him go. They sat like that in silence until workers with ropes and poles came galloping from Miloye. Hurrying to the ice-hole they thought that the princess and the doctor had frozen to death but then they noticed that Yekaterina Alexandrovna turned her head slightly as she watched how they laid the poles. They threw ropes around the sleigh and dragged the faithful shaft-horse on to the ice. Then something quite incomprehensible happened: when they were right at the edge of the main sheet of ice and the strong hands of the peasants had seized the princess, Grigory Ivanovich raised his head and opened his mouth, and they all heard how his benumbed tongue moved to utter, "Never mind, don't touch me." He stretched out towards Katyenka, groaned and then fell, stiff and unbending,

with a howl into the water to disappear like a stone under the ice.

The princess was wrapped up in sheepskins and taken to Miloye on a sled. The next day Alexander Vadimych came and took his daughter home with him.

The thing in this story that impressed Alexei Petrovich most was the death of Doctor Zabolkin. The more he thought about it, the clearer it became in his mind that this had not been a simple, accidental death but that it was the triumph of death, a sacrifice.

These ideas were all very disturbing. The prince was not even certain that Katyenka was still alive. It seemed senseless to remain in Moscow. He wrapped his last hundred rubles up in a piece of newspaper and went to Yaroslavl. There he boarded a steamer.

At one time he thought he would go to a village near Miloye and there find out something about Katya but he changed his mind. All he had to do was to go past Miloye and just once breathe *that* air and then—to hell with it all, even death from *delirium tremens*.

II

Alexei Petrovich lay on his side in a single cabin whose walls were lined with tin and painted walnut colour. Near the door water ran into a wash-basin. The blinds rattled. The sunlight, reflected in the water, came through the cracks in the blind and played in darting spots of light on the white ceiling.

On the table in front of the mirror stood a decanter of vodka, a plate and some tobacco in newspaper, on the floor was a portmanteau, almost empty, his coat was covering his legs.

In the summer heat the rhythmic pounding of the engines was lulling and it was easy to doze off on the soft bunk with the cool wind blowing through the window.

Alexei Petrovich snored, his face was pink, like that of a drunkard. For some time he had eaten scarcely anything, he had only been drinking and toying with the tasteless food. When the alcohol began to burn too badly and his mouth was dry he frowned and reached for a bottle of kvass, sipped a little and pulling up his knees turned his face to the wall.

One gets a terrible appetite on the river and it seems that no sooner is lunch over than the bell goes for tea. "Something salty wouldn't be bad just now," thought the prince as he heard a knock at the door and half asleep said, "Eh!" and opened his eyes.

Another knock came at the door.

"Get me a bottle, as cold as possible, and something," said the prince in a rasping voice.

"Something salty—that's good," he thought. "With something slightly salted and some horse-radish I can drink."

The knocking at the door continued.

"What the devil do you want?" exclaimed Alexei Petrovich throwing his legs down from the bunk and pushing back the bolt.

The door was cautiously opened and the young monk with the queue and in clerical cap looked in. He held the ends of his fingers in the sleeves of his robe.

"And you speak of the devil," began the monk. "Good-afternoon!" He bowed low and then with a smile looked at the disorder in the cabin.

In a sort of scare the prince looked straight into the clean, blue eyes in his small pockmarked face. There was, indeed, an appearance of smallness about the whole mien of the monk, not as if he had been knocked about, but he seemed so diminutive that there was not much of him to be knocked about.

"I've come for alms," continued the monk. "Our captain is a decent chap. 'You may ask for alms,' he said,

'only don't steal.' Why should I steal when people give me alms anyway? He said that you are a steady drunkard. But I can see you're not, are you? I feel I know you quite well."

He sat down beside Alexei Petrovich and put his hand on his knee; the prince moved aside, his puffed eyes goggling at the visitor.

"If it were not for worry a man might turn into a swine. It's true, old man, isn't it?" asked the monk suddenly.

Alexei Petrovich nodded his head, sighed deeply and answered, "It is impossible to live worse than I do!" Then he stuttered and said angrily, "Listen, I didn't send for you, why do you intrude on me? Please go away, it's miserable enough even without you."

"Not for anything will I go," answered the monk. "I see you've reached the limit. No, I shan't leave you."

Alexei Petrovich shook his head violently, everything was mixed and swimming in his mind. Then he began again in a sorrowful voice:

"Surely you are not a hallucination? That would be bad. Listen, d'you drink vodka?"

"What for?"

Alexei Petrovich again raised his bleary eyes—the monk's face seemed to be floating round the cabin.

"Drink, or I'll kill you!" he screamed in a voice that was not his own. The monk merely continued smiling. The prince, exhausted, lay back and closed his eyes.

"My goodness, what the man has come to!" The monk paused, and then continued in an unexpectedly loud and sharp voice, "I'll give you a different beverage. My beverage will fill you, it will give you peace and restore you to life. Listen to me. Much was given unto you and you lost everything. You lost it, however, not in order to find something of indifferent value but to find the eternal. Get up, and wherever I tell you to go, there you will go."

“Don’t shout, I’ll do everything, it would be better if you’d go,” thought the prince. The monk bent over Alexei Petrovich and stroked his head. The prince again screwed up his eyes.

“Come with me, dear,” continued the monk. “I’m telling you the right thing—renounce this life. Soon we shall reach *Undory* and there you will leave the boat; you’ll find me on shore. Think it over well and come. Understand?”

He stood quietly for a while and then apparently went out—the door latch rattled behind him.

Alexei Petrovich continued to lie there, collecting his thoughts with difficulty and wondering whether a man had really just been talking to him or whether he had been seeing things.

A long time passed in this way. The sunny patterns on the ceiling had long since disappeared, the cabin was getting dark, the lamp over the mirror glowed and then lit up by itself.

“Nonsense,” said the prince. “Yesterday I also dreamed that some jockey in a yellow cap was here.”

He stood up, looked at himself in the mirror and scarcely able to drag his game leg went into the second-class dining-room where he sat down in a corner without looking at anybody; in order not to hear the conversation he leaned his elbows on the table and put his hands over his ears. A waiter brought a cold decanter of vodka and some cold fish. The prince filled the sweating glass, added pepper, drank it off slowly and blowing out a blast of alcoholic breath, squinted at the fish.

Just then the steamer’s horn sounded and the boat began to turn. The curtains bellied out in the window and a voice at a neighbouring table said confidently:

“*Undory*. . . .”

Alexei Petrovich immediately jumped up and asked softly:

"Is it?" Then he went out on the dark deck.

As the steamer turned towards the jetty it churned up the black waters. Close alongside, lit up by floodlights, a boat with two boys in it bobbed up and down: one of the boys was rowing, the other was playing a balalaika. The boat disappeared into the darkness.

The prince leaned against the railing and watched as they drew near the wharf, saw the sailors throw lines that rattled on the roof of the little office, watched a sailor and three ragamuffins fix the gangway and stevedores, with sacks on their heads like hoods, run up the gangway taking long steps.

Then people appeared out of the entrails of the vessel carrying bundles and boxes on their backs and thrusting their tickets into a sailor's hand.

Alexei Petrovich looked carefully round and suddenly started as he saw, amidst the peasants, the well-known eyes: they were, however, immediately hidden by a bale of wool.

The prince hurried below, mixed with the crowd, and, biting his lip, looked about impatiently.

From the jetty he hurried on to the bank where women were sitting before stalls lit by lanterns, shouting and thrusting out to the passers-by roast pork and small loaves.

On the sandy bank Alexei Petrovich got hopelessly entangled in the mass of sacks and luggage. All that he could remember was that he had to find somebody and ask what to do next. Once he thought he saw somebody very familiar bending over one of the stalls. Later, between the carts in the distance he thought he saw somebody beckoning to him.

"Tugging me on," whispered Alexei Petrovich and bending low he ran by devious ways towards the carts.

At this moment the steamer's horn blew, she cast off from the jetty and her lights went out.

III

"Hi, stop, wait for me!" shouted Alexei Petrovich to the departing steamer as he hobbled towards the gangway.

A thickset stevedore barred his way.

"Too late, master, the steamer's gone!"

A sailor, market women and a worried young peasant with a goatee came up to him. They surrounded the prince and all began asking where he was going and where he had come from. Had he left money on the steamer? Was he married? They made exclamations and shook their heads. The worried peasant fussed about as though it were he who had been left behind and one of the women, pushing her way under Alexei Petrovich's very nose, announced to the world in tones of pleased astonishment:

"Why, he's drunk!"

Then everybody calmed down and began to show a friendly attitude towards Alexei Petrovich.

These aimless questions made the prince feel sick and pushing his way through the crowd he made off along the river-bank.

"I'll fall down somewhere and die, and that will be a good thing," he thought. "Nobody needs me and I'll just go on as long as my strength lasts. What a pity, oh, what a pity! What a way to end my life!"

At first Alexei Petrovich walked along the sandy bank towards which came the slow, invisible waves raised by the steamer. Soon, however, he came to a place where the sandy beach was intersected with deep channels over which he stumbled; he turned aside and made his way up to the bank to the fields above.

Only when he had with difficulty climbed the bank did he see the numerous stars above his head. The grass had already been mown and stacked. He stood still for a mo-

ment listening to the gurgling of a nearby quail and walked on faster—it was easier than it had been near the river where his feet sank into the sand.

“Where am I hurrying to as though I were being chased,” he thought at last and suddenly realized that he had not once looked behind him. Seized by a sudden fear he cringed and slowly looked back over his shoulder.

Coming from behind the hill the dark figure of the monk in his pointed cap was crossing a field, grey in the starlight.

“Chasing me,” thought Alexei Petrovich. “I must hide.” Bending low to the ground he ran to the nearest stack and lay down in the hay, pulling his legs up under him and trying not to breathe. The wilting hay smelt of henbane and wild onions. Alexei Petrovich choked. The monk walked past him, his eyes seeming to blaze with a blue light.

“What a devil!” thought Alexei Petrovich in fear. “Now I’m lost! Will he see me? He’s gone, thank God. No, he’s turning round. Nosing round like a wild beast. . . . Only I mustn’t make any noise. Perhaps I’m imagining things again: am I lying in the cabin and dreaming? No, this is earth and this is hay. And there are the stars. . . . You dear stars, I have always loved you. Lord, just now I believe in Thee.”

Alexei Petrovich, his hand on his heart, turned his head round and groaned. Just then the monk came round the haystack, sat down beside him and stroked his shoulder. The prince jumped up with a howl but there and then fell flat down again. His wide-open staring eyes were quite mad.

“Don’t you be afraid,” said the monk softly. “See what a state you’re in. Why do you hide from me?”

“I won’t again,” said Alexei Petrovich with difficulty. “Now I see that it is you, from Iverskaya. I have done what you told me to.”

The monk smiled and it seemed to the prince that his moustaches opened up and his tongue shot in and out from under them like that of a lizard.

The prince jumped up and would have run away but the monk caught him and pulled him down to the haystack again.

“What a fool, by God you are. Well, it can’t be helped, we’ll sleep a bit here on the grass. At first I meant to spend the night on some cart, we could have slept there. Never mind, sleep away, old man, and I’ll sing you a song.”

He lay down in the hay alongside the prince and soon began to sing in a thin drawling voice:

*I dozed off, mother mine,
And dreamed a strange dream.
A white horse, mother mine,
Took me o’er the fields.
From my head fell my cap
And I was a corpse. . .
Ne’er would I escape
My horrible fate.
My mother she answered,
“Someone’s horse goes by,
Bearing a white bride,
Dressed all in white,
Is she my son’s bride?”*

IV

When the morning sun fell on his closed eyelids Alexei Petrovich awoke, raised himself on his hands and groaned; the whole of his body ached.

The monk was sitting on the hay and had spread a napkin in front of him on which lay a knife, a piece of bread and two onions.

His white teeth were biting into a third onion. On his pockmarked face, around his blue eyes and under his chewed moustaches, good-humoured wrinkles were playing.

"Has the fug worn off?" he asked. "Here, sip this, I saved it for you—but I won't give you any more, see!"

He took off his cap, pulled out of it a small phial containing a mouthful of warm vodka and gave it to Alexei Petrovich. Alexei Petrovich took the phial, recalling with difficulty what had happened. When he sipped the vodka his mind cleared and the blood began to flow faster through his veins. The prince got up, straightened his crumpled clothes, felt his neck where it had been chafed by his collar, took the collar off and threw it away.

"Now your spirit is easier," said the monk. "Take in some of the fresh air—look how yellow you are."

"Wait a minute," said Alexei Petrovich, "did you take me off the steamer?"

"Yes."

"Why? I was travelling on business."

"Rubbish, you have no business to do."

"Why did you take me away?"

"So that you can live. What else is there to do in summer? As to work—you're no worker, you're frail and lame. The winter's cold. In winter I try to get into the lock-up. I hide my passport, go to the station and say, 'I've lost my memory, have no relatives and nowhere to live.' They feed me and in the spring I tell them who I am. Sometimes I have been beaten for that trick. That's how."

Alexei Petrovich listened attentively, knitting his brows: the monk seemed unpleasant to him but there was clarity and strength in his words. "To hell with him," thought the prince. "And what next, if I send him to the devil? Back to a steamer? And where shall I go? And what for? Shall I go with him? It's funny, all the

same, that I should suddenly take to tramping on the highways."

"Do you know whom you're talking to?" asked Alexei Petrovich, screwing up his eyes.

The monk winked slyly.

"I don't care if you're the Sultan of Turkey."

"The devil alone knows what nonsense this is," thought the prince. "I think I really will take to the road with him. Somewhere or other I'll peg out. 'Sultan of Turkey!'" Then he said weakly:

"Tell me some more. How are we going to take to the road?"

And so they walked across the mown field towards a distant forest over which the white clouds were piled up high.

The clouds floated up slowly from behind the forest, rose up high above the fields casting cool shadows as they drifted lazily along and, after crossing the whole curve of the sky, they banked up on the opposite edge of the earth. By the sun it was already past eight o'clock. In the hazy distance the whole surface of the blue river sparkled as it bent behind some chalk hills.

"Let them try and drive me away from here," said the monk turning first to the river and then to the forest. "They can't do it. I, like the ground squirrel, have the right to live wherever I wish. Do you know how they live?"

He began telling him how squirrels live: he caught a grasshopper, and clapped his hands when a quail flew up from under his feet.

"That's for you, bobtail!"

Alexei Petrovich walked along a little behind his companion, his eyes screwed up; he had begun to imagine that soon they would come to the end of the earth and then they would go through the crystal air to the clouds and even higher, to where there was only wind and sun.

Soon he got tired of walking and, sitting down by the road, asked for something to eat.

"Wonderful, astounding," thought Alexei Petrovich lying flat on his back after he had eaten. "The sky is so blue. To go wandering really—people do wander about the world. Everything that's unnecessary is blown away by the wind, yes, that's it, wind and clouds! And if I've had beating, so has the monk. Wait, though, what did he tell me at Iverskaya? Of course: that's where this wandering began, and this freedom and ease, and this whole world as clear as crystal. Astonishing, to remember nothing, to get used to nothing. . . ."

In the evening they went into the forest and spent the night on a bed of straw under the stairs of a house belonging to a woman who only asked, "You're not thieves, are you?"

In the morning they again wandered across the fields. On either side waved fields of ripening rye—grasshoppers jumped into it from under their feet. Alexei Petrovich began to complain that his feet hurt. The monk took off the prince's boots and put them in his sack and bound his feet with woollen footcloth: it was easy to walk in the soft cloth. Alexei Petrovich did everything the monk told him to and limping along with a stick he thought that his whole life was now behind him, in that yellow cabin, and that here, before him, there was only the wind rustling the cornfield, columns of dust in the distance, a cart standing on a path between two fields and near it a faint wisp of smoke; beyond that hazy, quivering distance like a phantom sea there lived, invisible from here, Katya.

"You know, I have a sister living here, her name's Katya," said the prince one day as they lay in the rye watching the golden ears waving in the sky above their heads.

"We'll visit her, we'll visit her," answered the monk. "The summer is long and man is like a cloud; it has

been said: take up thy staff and go—in order not to get used to home, not to collect too many vices.”

Alexei Petrovich, however, did not listen to the end of this reasoning—he only repeated to himself, “We’ll go to her, we’ll go to her,” and they would go and go together.

The monk avoided the bigger villages where there was a policeman or police officer and the prince had to spend his nights in gullies where in the morning the sharp-winged swifts screamed overhead, or in the barn of an outlying farm or under a cart in the fields.

Alexei Petrovich was astonished at himself that the lice, mud and manure did not disgust him when he dropped down tired wherever he was, to awake happy and fresh in the morning.

Everywhere the two tramps were accepted simply and nobody asked who they were; most people listened to the monk’s stories, everybody understanding them in his own way: some people laughed and did not believe them; some were surprised—“this is a big world”; some simply shook their heads; and some woman would sigh although she herself did not know why. They called the prince “master” and were sorry for him and Alexei Petrovich was astonished at the amount of pity there was amongst the common people.

“There are plenty of us on the road like this,” the monk said to him one day. “A man can live, he may have everything and he’s only bored. I’ve been through that myself. I drank vodka, gallons of it. I would lie down on the floor with a bottle of vodka and a glass beside me, and not eat but only drink until my face turned black. I drank so much that I began to see things—a horse with horns and the head of a bird, quite naked, crawled out from under the bed. I wallowed like that for a long time. There were many more things like that. Another gets the blues so bad he takes a pistol and, bang! blows off his

brains—and that's the end of it. There are a lot of them do away with themselves. And there are some people who kill others out of sheer boredom, by God, it's true. Some day they are struck by the idea that it will always be like today: eat, drink and then die. They go in for debauchery like madmen, so that vice becomes second nature. When a man's in such a state why shouldn't he take a jab with a knife? Very simple, if he wants to very much. There are others who are sorry for themselves and take to the road. I've taken many of them away myself. Last year I had a comrade, a fellow like you. We walked and walked, and then he up and confessed to murder."

"That's all true, all true enough," answered Alexei Petrovich (they were sitting under a stack of last year's straw, on the ridge of a hill, looking down at a village which was defined by a dark line of roofs, bird houses on poles and chimneys outlined against the sunset). "Now I think I understand why I am tramping. Perhaps I shall rid myself of uncleanness and then—" He was suddenly silent, turned away and his eyes filled with tears. In order to hide his excitement he finished by laughing softly: "But you've been wandering your whole life, you're a tramp, a real loafer."

"I regard such talk as nonsense," answered the monk. "Every man to his desires: there are some people who feel very happy sitting on a chair at home and there are others who ride through the town on a droshky with an accordion and are also very happy about it. There's nothing wrong with that but what's bad is that a man's head is all muddled. And perhaps I am also running away from my conscience? How do you know?"

On the tenth day they came back to the Volga again. After the conversation under the straw stack the monk did not sing any more but thought all the time, looking down at his feet. Alexei Petrovich also thought a lot, thought clearly and joyfully. It seemed that all his past

had been an evil obsession, a sort of spiritual delirium, but now he was walking through the rye, in the sunshine, and he loved as he had never loved before.

In a village near the river, some thirty versts from Miloye, the monk was stopped by a policeman who also looked at the prince's passport, shook his head and said:

"All right, get along with you. Only we don't allow people with no employment here. And look out, you son-of-a-bitch, if I catch you again I'll lock you up."

Alexei Petrovich took his passport back, left the village and went into an oak grove on the river-bank. When night came the lights of a distant town shone like stars amongst the hills on the opposite bank.

The silence of the grove, the babbling and murmuring of the river and these flickering lights were well-known and familiar. Lying on the grass in the darkness Alexei Petrovich wept, thinking:

"Darling Katya, my dear wife."

THE LAST CHAPTER

I

There was a great deal of traffic the next evening at Krasnov's hotel where the town theatre gave its shows. Rain had wetted the asphalt sidewalk that was lit by an opaque street lamp. The people poured out of the doors like water out of a pipe and parted company on the sidewalk: some hurried home, some to restaurants, others stayed to look at the ladies and the young girls.

The landed gentry from the backwoods, elbowing their way through the crowd, kept saying, "Pardon," as they jostled people; the local gentry stood politely aside and discussed the play; when the Marshal of the Nobility—a model of English upbringing combined with corpulence

—came out, the porter, flinging back the doors, shouted loudly, "Carriagel"

Clerks standing on either side of the doorway looked curiously at the nobility; boys from the Gymnasium, wearing peaked caps after the Prussian fashion, crowded at the doors to get a better view of the young ladies and to shout "Encore!" to the famous actress who had just been playing.

The ladies, young and old, the wives of the clerks and merchants, wrapping themselves in their scarves and shawls, lifted their skirts and walked along the wet sidewalk.

At last Volkov and Katya appeared in the doorway.

"Krasnopol'skaya, Krasnopol'skaya," whispered the boys.

Mushchinkin, a clerk of small stature with enormous moustaches, scrambled right under Katya's feet, throwing his head back.

Katyenka really was unusually beautiful in her white coat and a little hat of violets. Her face of creamy white, like ivory, was stern, her lips were pressed haughtily together, her eyes were flaming—feverish and big.

The play had upset Katyenka for every word seemed to have been written about her past. Men from the boxes and stalls seemed to be deliberately staring at Krasnopol'skaya impertinently and unconscionably and their glances tortured her.

The porter removed his cap and asked Volkov:

"Whom shall I call for, Your Excellency?"

"Call out Pyotr, brother, and yell as loud as you can."

The porter yelled across the whole square:

"Pyotr, carriage!"

As Katyenka followed her father into the carriage she caught her dress on the brass door handle and turned round. "Katya!" she heard a nearby voice say; she trembled, looked, passed her hand over her eyes, dropped

into the deep seat of the carriage and the horses moved off.

The prince stood under the street lamp, hatless and in rags and worn-out boots. Craning his neck he looked after the departing carriage and repeated that one word, "Katya!"

"What're you standing here for, move along, move along," said a policeman.

The prince walked away from the lamp and immediately saw Tsuruyupa, who was looking at him through a lorgnette with unconcealed curiosity.

"Prince, what sort of a masquerade is this?" exclaimed Tsuruyupa, seizing the prince by the arm; he called for his brougham and no matter how the prince wriggled and muttered, "This has to be, leave me alone, I don't want to go," he forced him into the carriage and ordered the coachman to race downhill to catch the last ferry across the river.

Alexei Petrovich sat in silence, huddled up in the carriage; he answered questions briefly and did everything he could to prevent his teeth from chattering from an irrepressible tremor. The prince realized that Tsuruyupa and everybody else will, of course, very naturally and simply accomplish that which he would never be able to accomplish by himself.

"A silly play, I tell you," Volkov was saying to his daughter as they rocked along in the carriage. "I don't understand all the excitement about it, I even dozed off. And you, dearest, should not get so excited. You aren't tired, are you?"

"No, no, Papa," answered Katya, "only I don't want to spend the night in town, let's go straight home."

"You're right out of your mind, Katya! Aunt Olga is waiting with supper for us. How can we offend the old lady? Now, now, don't be worried, we'll take a bite and then we'll excuse ourselves on account of some business

or other and go home. Ugh, Katyenka, I don't understand you young people of today. You've got some nonsense in your heads, you're flighty. People used to live more simply."

II

Not for nothing did Alexander Vadimych talk about flighty people or *vertige* as Aunt Olga said. Volkov had had a bad time of it that year. Katyenka had been ill all the winter, and she was just recovering when Kondraty had inadvertently mentioned that the doctor had been drowned in that ice-hole and the *vertige* began in Katya's head. At one time Alexander Vadimych even wanted to leave the house altogether — so unbearable had it all become.

At nights, Katyenka, half dressed, would go to her father's room: she trembled and glanced into dark corners, sat on the sofa, pulled her feet up under her and did not move, only stared at the candle. Then her face would be racked with spasms, she would have fits, clench her teeth and tell her father for the hundredth time the story of what had happened that night. In order to get his daughter's mind off those stories Alexander Vadimych thought it over and said to her:

"Grigory Ivanovich did not kill himself, and I don't think you're in any way to blame: it was fated that way, he was doomed."

"What are you saying?" asked Katyenka, all atremble. "Doomed? That means he was a victim?"

She suddenly calmed down. Once she spoke about the prince, simply and with a bitter smile on her lips, Alexander Vadimych cursed. She did not continue the conversation but apparently she thought a lot and had guessed something. When spring came Alexander Vadimych said one day:

“Katyusha, let’s go to Aunt Olga, my dear.”

Katyenka only shrugged her shoulders and said:

“All right. . . .”

The catastrophe had affected Sasha differently. When Grigory Ivanovich went away with the princess she knew that he would not return. If he did come back he would be a stranger to her. She also realized that her life with the doctor was all wrong and at that time in the garden she should not have consented but should have gone away. As she lay in her room she thought about how she would dress as an old woman and would wander along the roads begging alms in the name of Christ. Sasha felt that her life would not be one of passion as at present but one of rapture before heaven, before earth and before people.

At dawn a knock came at the door. Sasha, trembling like an aspen leaf, dressed and went to open it. Father Vasily came into the cottage, glanced round and said:

“He’s drowned, Grigory Ivanovich, in the river.”

Sasha bowed her head and muttered:

“God have mercy on us,” crossed herself and sat down on the bench for her legs would not hold her.

Father Vasily told her everything he had learned from the Kolyvan peasant who had helped the Miloye workers get the princess out of the ice-hole. Sasha listened calmly to the whole story and at the end she said:

“He was not drowned, they drowned him. Here is some money, say a burial service for Grigory, the servant of our Lord.”

Sasha lived on in the cottage through the whole winter, tended the cattle and kept everything clean and in good order; in the evenings she would sit at the table and look at the books Grigory Ivanovich had loved. When the wind howled round the roof with particular ferocity Sasha

would raise her brows: it seemed to her that it was not the wind howling, but the unpenitent soul of Grigory Ivanovich.

When spring came she put on a black cloth kerchief, like a nun's, and left the village. And nobody has seen her ever since.

III

Despite all her father's winks and Aunt Olga's persuasions, Katyenka insisted that they go home immediately after supper. At dawn she was already sitting in bed, worn out and overexcited, waiting for Kondraty, who was getting her father ready for bed.

Katyenka had always felt that the prince would want to offer her a last insult, she was expecting it and was preparing her defence. In her imagination he was always the abuser and she was the offended innocent. The best defence of all, of course, would be to maintain an indifferent, contemptuous, icy calm on meeting him. But now all these foolish ideas meant nothing at all.

The prince, ragged, unhappy, gaunt, had stirred her imagination and aroused her curiosity. He was not triumphant, not an abuser but was begging for mercy, praying, as though her glance meant life or death to him. That's what she now felt. Her heart was breaking with sorrow. The strangest thing of all was that Katyenka did not feel—although she wanted to—the anger and hurt she had formerly felt.

At last Kondraty came, closed the door carefully and then asked mysteriously:

"What is it?"

"Kondraty, I have seen the prince." (Kondraty only coughed.) "I don't understand anything. He was begging for alms. Unhappy, gaunt. . . . Has he murdered somebody or what? Why is he hiding?"

"Very simple, he's murdered somebody," said Kondraty.

"For God's sake, don't tell Father anything. Go to Miloye or to town at once . . . go where you like. . . ." Her voice broke off for a minute. "If you see him don't tell him I sent you. No, it doesn't matter, say what you like. . . . Only don't let him torment me any more."

Kondraty went out. Katyenka sat on the bed looking at the patches of light on the old parquet where the sun's rays broke through the foliage. Through the open window the whistling of the oriole, the cooing of the doves and the chirping of the sparrows came from a garden still bathed in dew; a green and luxurious garden. A foolish fly was beating against the upper panes of the window and did not have sense enough to go lower down. The fly probably thought that the blue sky was just within reach on the other side of the window, and that the trees and the butterflies white as flowers and the birds and the dew were all a dream that it could reach only if it banged itself to death against the glass.

"How that fly bothers me," said Katyenka and she slipped out of bed and with a towel beat at the glass and drove the fly out into the garden, then folded her hands behind her back and began pacing up and down the room.

The whole of that tormenting, passionate year of her life passed through her mind. There had been no joy in it. As she now recalled it, however, she did not feel either pain or hopelessness. It was as though all that had been was over and had passed into the hazy distance, had developed into a sweet sorrow. The feeling of liberty was left and that inexplicable joy that is felt only by very young, strong and passionate people.

Katyenka passed her hands firmly over her face and eyes, shook her head and suddenly with unusual clarity of vision peered into the very depths of her soul.

Having taken that look she forgot herself and smiled tenderly with a clear fresh smile.

"All right," she repeated, "I'm ready."

IV

All the servants of the prince's household at Miloye were gathered in the kitchen listening to footman Vasily's account of how His Excellency the Prince had arrived suddenly by night from somewhere unknown.

"I saw a tramp creeping into the house, and I said to him, 'Where d'you think you're going, hairy face?' and he greeted me, 'Good-evening, Vasily. And how is everything at home, everything all right?' I nearly died. I saw it was him! He was wearing clothes worse than our herdsman Yefimka wears. Well, I took him upstairs to the bedroom. He pointed to a chair. 'Is that,' he asked, 'where the mistress sat?' I told him she sat everywhere. He looked at the chair as though it were a woman. I almost burst from laughing. 'Go now,' he said, 'I'll fix things myself, but prepare a bath.' I looked through the crack of the door and saw what he has come to: he lay on the princess' bed and hugged the pillow. Probably starved. I suppose various ladies in the town have fleeced him. He's sleeping now, he'll sleep for a couple of days if we don't wake him. Yes, I've lived in a good many places but I've never seen such goings-on before."

Vasily straightened a waistcoat with two watch-chains, got out a cigarette-case (a gift from the prince), lit a cigarette and crossed his legs.

"I don't know how he'll manage to live with the princess now. It will be no easy job for him. We'll see some fine things."

Everybody in the kitchen was eaten up with curiosity. People came running from the servants' quarters to listen to Vasily. And the prince slept on. Suddenly Kondraty

appeared at the back door, dusty and gloomy; he asked sharply:

"Has the prince arrived?"

"Yes, he's arrived all right," answered Vasily, "but the orders are not to wake him."

"You'll have to wake him."

Kondraty had to stand a long time at the bedroom door coughing and tapping with his fingers. At last the prince answered in a sleepy voice, "What? I'll get up, right now." He must have sat up in bed for some time before he could collect his thoughts, then he said in a different voice, "Come in."

Kondraty, his lips pursed, went in. Alexei Petrovich looked straight at him for several minutes, jumped out of bed, ran to him, sat him down on a chair and turned so pale, trembled so violently that the old servant forgot all the insulting words he had intended hurling at His Excellency, turned away, champed his jaws and then said simply:

"The princess ordered me to inquire after your health. In the winter she almost died herself. And she doesn't wish to see you on any account."

"Kondraty, did she send you herself?"

The prince seized his hand.

"You must understand yourself. I have nothing to tell you because you acted dishonestly. I was ordered to inquire after your health and nothing else."

The prince did not speak for a long time. Then, leaning his head on the table, he wept. Kondraty's heart softened towards him but nevertheless he did not give in.

"That's all," he said moving towards the door.

"Don't go, wait a minute," said the prince, stretching out across the table, "I'll write."

With a spluttering, rusty nib, he began to write in quivering letters:

"Dear Katya..." (He crossed that out.) "I ask nothing of you and do not dare. . . . But you are the only person in the whole world that I love. I had a companion, he's in prison now, he taught me to love. When I think of you—my soul is filled with light, joy and happiness such as I have never known. I know that I am not worthy of seeing you. Still, forgive me. If you can forgive me. . . . *I will come on my knees. . . .*"

V

Tsuryupa came to Volkovo in the evening (he had become a frequent visitor that summer) and went straight to Alexander Vadimych's study; terribly indignant, he began to tell him about the prince. Volkov, however, interrupted him.

"I know everything, it is a great misfortune and I have even turned grey, and please don't mention that scoundrel's name any more." Volkov walked over to the window and began to talk about farming. Just then Kondraty drove into the yard in a gig.

"Where's that old devil been?" mused Volkov and bending over the window-sill, shouted to him:

"Where have you been?"

Kondraty shook his head and drove up to the window; he explained that he had brought a letter for the princess. "Oho," said Volkov and shutting the window went to his daughter's room.

Tsuryupa became uncommonly excited, guessing that the letter was from the prince.

Before a minute had passed Volkov came running back, breathing heavily, red and furious.

"No ink!" he shouted, pushing at the inkpot. "Where's that pencil gone?" Seizing the pencil that was quickly offered him, he wrote in big letters "SIR" on that same sheet of paper on the other side of which he had drawn

the hare, fox, wolf and dogs a year ago, then dropped back in his chair and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"What's happened?" asked Tsur'yupa cautiously. "Tell me all about it, perhaps I can help?"

"But it's sheer insolence!" screamed Alexander Vadi-myh. "No, I'll answer. What a scoundrel of a fellow!" "SIR, I cannot find words to account for such a brazen action," he wrote.

"D'you understand, he's asking for pardon, has sent a note, as though nothing had happened. And I'll answer, 'My daughter is not a housemaid that you should send her notes. It is, indeed, fitting for you to come *on your knees* (he underscored the last words) and with the greatest humility beg her pardon under her window.'"

"Oh, isn't that a bit too strong?" said Tsur'yupa, his monocle in his restless eye, reading over Volkov's shoulder. "There's no other way of bringing things home to such unfeeling people, though. I would advise you to liand the whole business over to a lawyer. And how is Yekaterina Alexandrovna? Is she upset?"

"What?" screamed Volkov on a still higher note. "She's crying, of course. And what has it to do with you? Get to hell out of here."

Kat'yenka, however, was not crying. While she was awaiting Kondraty's return she stood at the window with her fists clenched, or sat down in a deep armchair, or took up a book and kept reading the same phrase over and over again: "Then Yury, filled with noble wrath, rose to his full height and exclaimed, 'Never in my life.'" She would put down the book and repeat to herself, "I must be firm, I must be firm." Her thoughts were already far away and she could again see the round globe of the electric lamp and standing under it on the wet asphalt a pitiful-looking man, and she could see his eyes—huge, mad, dark. . . . Kat'yenka covered her face with her hand, got up and walked about, took up the book and read:

"Then Yury, filled with noble wrath—" Oh God, oh God, and Kondraty still does not come, and the day dragged out like a year.

At last she heard her father's heavy footsteps in the passage, the door opened with a crash and he and Kondraty came in with the letter.

Katyenka went as white as a sheet and pressed her lips together. Her father tore open the envelope and thrust the letter before her. She began reading slowly. Before she had read to the end she understood, understood everything that the prince felt when he had written those pitiful lines. Her spirit became calm and solemn. She handed the letter to her father. He read it rapidly and then asked in a voice that trembled with excitement:

"Will you answer yourself?"

"I don't know. As you will. It doesn't matter."

"Then I'll answer," roared Alexander Vadimych. "I'll answer him. Let him crawl here on his knees. Boasts that he'll come crawling on his knees. . . . Let him crawl!"

"His Excellency is not himself," Kondraty put in warily. "He is very much upset."

"Silence! I know what to do!" screamed Alexander Vadimych; he thrust the prince's letter into his trousers' pocket and ran out of the room.

Katyenka shouted after him:

"No, Papa, I'll write myself! Wait!" and was about to run to the door, but stopped and dropped her hands to her sides. "It doesn't matter, Kondraty, what is to be will be."

"He'll come crawling, he'll crawl to you on his knees," said Kondraty. "He's in such a state that he'll crawl."

The letter was sent to the prince next day just as day was breaking. Katyenka knew what her father had written but her heart was calm and clear.

In the morning, clouds as grey as smoke rolled over Volkovo, a rich odour came from the corn and grass fields, columns of dust whirled along the roads and disappeared behind the hill, the thunder rumbled, there were flashes of lightning but not a single drop of rain, it seemed to be gathering in order to burst in a warm down-pour over the roof, garden, and fields.

Alexander Vadimych sat at the upper window of his house behind the branches of a birch-tree; with one eye closed he was studying the road through a telescope.

The boys of the estate workers had climbed on to the roof of the carriage-house and were staring at the place where the road that wound round the hill disappeared amongst the cornfields.

In the open gates of the carriage-house stood a grey colt harnessed to a light carriage. The coachman sat on a log by the wall, slapping his bootleg with the whip-handle. The milkmaid, coming out of the ice-cellar, stood her buckpail of milk on the grass and also stared, folding her arms under the apron.

A peasant came up on a cart, removed his cap, bowed to the master at the window, got off the cart and stood perfectly still. Everybody was waiting.

Katyenka, fully dressed, was lying on her bed, her head buried in the pillow. The messenger who had been sent to Miloye with the letter had already returned with the answer that the prince had started crawling.

Three hours before Kondraty had gone out to meet him. According to Alexander Vadimych's calculations the prince should by now be crawling up the sandy hill where the willow clumps on the river-bank began and where it was even difficult for the horses to pull a carriage.

Suddenly the boys on the roof began to shout:

"He's coming, he's coming!"

Volkov, his slippers flapping, hurried to his daughter's room. Katyenka, however, was already on the porch. Her braids had come undone and were hanging down her back. Holding on to the column of the porch she peered at the distant road.

The peasant who was standing by the cart spoke to the milkmaid:

"Is it the governor they're waiting for?"

"Who knows, perhaps it is the governor," answered the woman; she took up her pail and went away.

A pedestrian appeared, coming along the road from behind the hill. The boys on the roof shouted again:

"It's a woman, a woman, a beggar!"

Then Katyenka tore her hand away from the column, went down into the yard and shouted:

"The carriage, quickly!"

With a rattle the grey stallion dashed out of the carriage-house. Katyenka jumped into the carriage, snatched the reins from the coachman, slapped the horse on the back with them and dashed away, leaving a trail of dust behind her.

The cloud of dust hung over the road for a long time, then whirled into a column and dashed across the field to the consternation of the superstitious who believed that if you threw a knife into one of those roving columns of dust it would collapse and a drop of blood would remain on the knife.

Halfway up the sandy slope of the hill that rose up above the undergrowth of elders, the prince was on his knees, supporting himself on his hands in the sand. His head was bowed, sweat poured from his face, there was a whistling sound in his throat as he breathed, the veins on his neck were strained until they stood out, blue in colour.

Behind him, holding by the bridle a roan gelding that was tossing its head and brushing the flies away, stood

Kondraty, looking with pity at the prince and sighing deeply.

The horse-flies also hovered over the prince's head but Kondraty would not allow them to settle on him.

"That's enough, sir, get up, why it's a mountain," he said. "I'll put you on the gelding and soon as we come within sight of Volkovo you can crawl again, it's downhill there."

Alexei Petrovich straightened his back with an effort, threw forward a badly lacerated knee that was coated with congealed blood, a knee in a torn trouser-leg, hurriedly crawled a few paces and again fell. His face was grey, his eyes were half closed, a lock of hair was stuck to his forehead and there were sharply defined wrinkles around his mouth.

"You still have a long way to crawl," repeated Kondraty. "Get on the gelding, in the name of Christ our Lord I beseech you!"

He looked piteously at the sand hill and suddenly stood stock-still.

From the hilltop Katyenka came racing down, thrashing the grey stallion with her reins. She had already seen her husband, turned the carriage sharply aside, jumped out without stopping it, ran to Alexei Petrovich, sat down beside him and hastily lifted up his face. The prince straightened up, seized Katya's hand firmly and began looking very, very closely into her wonderful eyes with tears running down from them. . . .

"I love you, I love you, of course I love you," she said and helped her husband to his feet.

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